

 NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC

The Year of the Maya

RENAISSANCE IN MEXICO PAGE 79

TRAVELER

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AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2012

A Scottish Obsession

One Man's Quest to Reach the
Islands of His Dreams

A ROOM
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10 Places to Celebrate

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Calakmul, Campeche.

Palenque, Chiapas.



Was this the first suite with an ocean view ?

*// The Castle used to be a lighthouse
for Mayan seafers. //*

Tulum, Quintana Roo.



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[NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELER]

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THE AGE OF MAYA

The end of the world as we know it? Unlikely. Even so, Mexico primes for a new dawn

By JOSHUA BERMAN AND
ANDREW EVANS

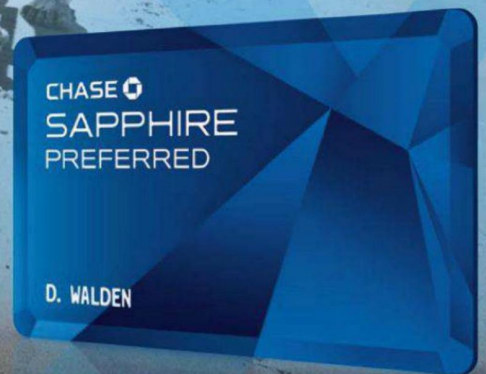
Aerial angle: A galaxy of lesser flamingos hovers over Lake Bogoria in Kenya's Great Rift Valley, page 56.

PACK A SUITCASE, LEAVE THE SUIT.



2X POINTS ON
TRAVEL

WHY NOT PRETEND THAT FOR JUST THIS WEEKEND
THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS WORK?



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CHASE 

DREAM BIG. TRAVEL FAR.

Did you know that most Americans have a special destination they dream of visiting? They want to see the world and are ready to cross a location off their list this year. So what's on your bucket list?



Venice, Italy

If the Leaning Tower of Pisa and Coliseum come to mind, you're not alone. Hilton Garden Inn's recent guest survey found that more than half of Americans want to travel to Italy. Additionally the Iditarod and Mount McKinley resonated with 50% of those surveyed who also yearn to experience the last frontier—Alaska. If either one is on your list, Hilton Garden Inn has you covered, and with nearly 550 hotels around the world, they'll be there to welcome you all over the globe.

Wherever you go, Hilton Garden Inn wants to make your preferred destination, or any other travel, a triumph. All locations offer relaxing accommodations, a complimentary fitness center, and free Wi-Fi for your enjoyment. You can even treat yourself to a surplus

of comforts like a full-service bar and restaurant with cooked-to-order breakfast—a real dream come true!

Start checking off your bucket list today. Enter Hilton Garden Inn's "Life's Ultimate To-Do List" contest for a chance to win the trip of your life. For details please visit **HGI.com/UltimateToDo**.



Bald Eagle in Alaska

National Geographic Traveler's
Digital Nomad



Andrew Evans's Ultimate To-Do List

DONE

- ☒ Rode a bus from Washington, DC to Antarctica
- ☒ Went diving on Australia's Great Barrier Reef
- ☒ Soaked in a Turkish bath in Budapest
- ☒ Zoomed the length of Japan on the bullet train
- ☒ Kayaked with blue whales in Quebec
- ☒ Galloped on horseback in Patagonia

DREAMS OF DOING

- ☐ See lemurs in Madagascar
- ☐ Ride a camel in the Sahara
- ☐ Celebrate carnival in Brazil
- ☐ Float over Switzerland in a hot air balloon
- ☐ Eat spaghetti in Rome
- ☐ Track gorillas in Rwanda
- ☐ Stargaze in Chile's Atacama Desert
- ☐ Drive a convertible down Route 66

Life's
**ULTIMATE
TO-DO**
LIST

1. GO WALK THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA
2. FIND THE LOCH NESS MONSTER
3. CLIMB THE LEANING TOWER OF PISA
4. _____
(WHAT'S YOURS?)

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We all have dreams. Some big, some small, but they all inspire us to get out there and take on the world. Hilton Garden Inn® is going to make those dreams come true for some lucky Hilton Garden Inn fans. Just visit us at HGI.com/UlimateToDo and tell us what's at the very top of your ultimate to-do list for a chance to win the adventure of a lifetime.



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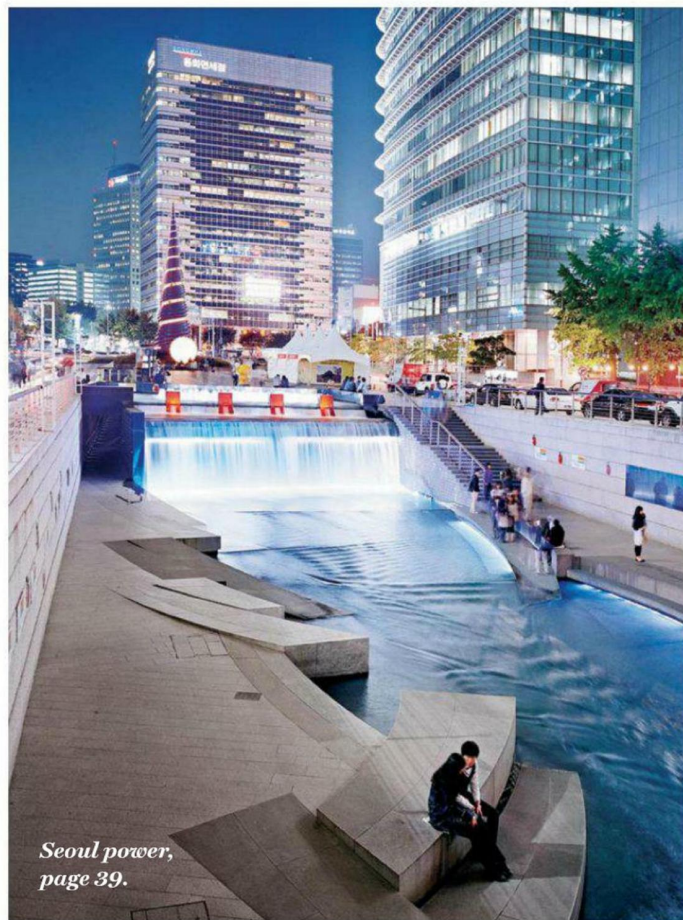
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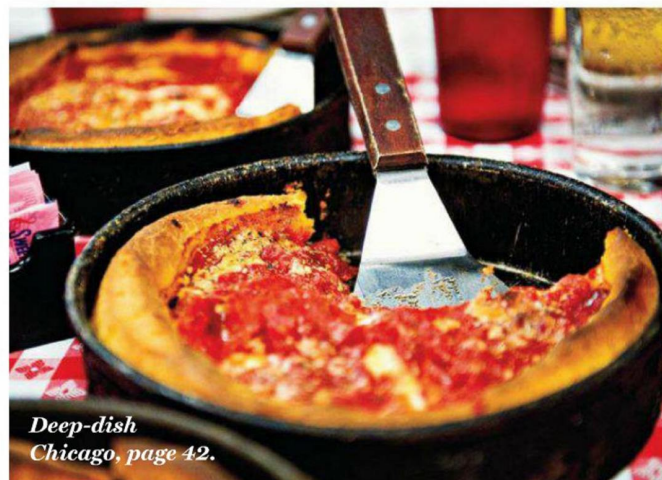
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Port of Call

Brussels, Belgium



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hotels, page 41.*



*Deep-dish
Chicago, page 42.*

ON THE COVER: *Isle of Jura, Inner Hebrides, Scotland, by Jim Richardson*

Touch Korea



- ① Follow the yellow ribbon and rotate your neck to the beat
- ② Feel the exciting rhythms of traditional Korean Samulnori!



Buchaecheum



Nanta



B-boy

* Samulnori is one of the world's most dynamic music created by a *kkwaenggwari* (small flat gong), a *janggu* (traditional hourglass drum), a *buk* (barrel drum), and a *jing* (large gong).

Lively Beats of Korea

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Thomas Jefferson's Rotunda is at the heart of the University of Virginia, a World Heritage site.

[EDITOR'S NOTE]

Travel Treasury

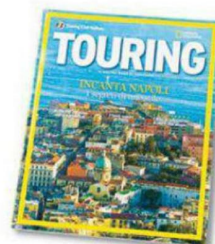
FORTY YEARS AGO, before the “bucket list” craze, the international World Heritage Convention—its creation led by two American politicians in a bipartisan effort—set out to curate a list of the world’s greatest treasures. Monitored by UNESCO, the compendium imaginatively includes such cultural touchstones as Japan’s Kabuki theater and, in a sense, attempts to put its institutional finger in the leaky dike against cultural erosion. This collection of 936 places and 267 customs (to date) is mind-bogglingly eclectic and deeply considered with ten nominating criteria. Listees can be dumped if they fail to maintain grade—as Dresden’s Elbe Valley was in 2009—and there is pressure to be more aggressive with demotions. It’s not just a roundup of the usual suspects, though many are included, such as the Taj Mahal, Angkor, the Great Wall of China, the Galápagos Islands, Venice and its lagoon, and the Grand Canyon (the 21 U.S. sites are almost all national parks). It also embraces the gloriously unheralded: the Ruins of Loropéni (Burkina Faso), Head-Smashed-in-Buffalo Jump (Canada), Crespi d’Adda (Italy), the Old Town of Lijiang (China), Kuk Early Agricultural Site (Papua New Guinea), and Ironbridge Gorge (U.K.). Just to read the World Heritage List is to travel to the far reaches of the globe.

This magazine has long shared many World Heritage ideals: We value place and culture, and we recognize that many of the greatest examples of both are under assault—whether through commerce, indifference, political incompetence, or tourism itself. On page 56, we pay tribute to the list’s 40th anniversary by highlighting ten lesser known wonders, including Thomas Jefferson’s combined masterpiece: Monticello and the University of Virginia (see our iPad edition for a 360-degree view). Enjoy—and surprise yourself. —KEITH BELLOWES

[FOREIGN DESK]

AN ITALIAN HOLIDAY

Traveler recently welcomed *National Geographic Touring*, based in Milan, Italy, as one of 15 local-language foreign editions. We checked in with our new partners for their take on *la dolce vita*. “August is holiday time here, which means empty cities and crowded beaches,” says editor Stefano Brambilla. “It may not seem to be the best time to enjoy the country—unless you know where to go.” Brambilla shares a few tips:



MILAN ON TWO WHEELS

August is perfect for exploring Milan. I like to rent from the bike-sharing service, BikeMi, and visit museums and churches at my leisure. The traffic is gone, finally!

TASTING THE REAL TUSCANY

When I want some peace in beautiful Tuscany, I go to Maremma in the region’s south. After spending a weekend in the towns of Massa Marittima and Pitigliano—with great wine and food, of course—I’m a new man.

HEADING FOR THE (BIG) HILLS

When the cities get too hot, retreat to the mountains—the Alps and also the Apennines.

My favorite is Gran Sasso National Park, in the Abruzzi region, not far from Rome. It’s our little Wild West, with marvelous open landscapes.

SECLUSION IN SARDINIA

Beaches are full around the country, but I know I can be alone in Scivu, on the southwestern coast of Sardinia. White dunes and the best blue colors: a true paradise.

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TRAVEL TALK



Travel as Lifeline

READERS RESPONDED STRONGLY to Edward Readicker-Henderson's essay about how travel keeps him alive ("Cheating Death," May 2012, above). Pamela Beere Briggs of **Los Angeles** wrote: "Being diagnosed with breast cancer feels like standing at the edge of a cliff. I'm afraid of heights, so looking down is the worst idea. Travel helps me to look out at the view and forget my fears. 'Cheating Death' is a reminder that 'the view,' and staying in the moment, allow us to be truly alive. My epiphany came in Avebury, an ancient stone circle in England." The article also inspired wanderlust. Karen Drellich of **Walnut Creek, Calif.**, says she now quotes Readicker-Henderson in her e-mail signature:

"Whoever created the world went to a lot of trouble. It would be downright rude not to go out and see as much of it as possible."

PET PEEVES Christopher Elliott's column about pet travel (The Insider, May 2012) got readers barking. "I'm so annoyed," wrote Angela Lovell of **New York City**. "I travel with two small dogs, who fit into the same bag (permitted on certain airlines). My dogs sleep in-flight; people rarely know they're there. However, I'm extremely allergic to smoke, perfume, and cats. Never have the last bothered me on a flight, and I assure you: If the humans reeking of fragrance and cigarettes were confined to a bag at my feet, they wouldn't bother me either."

A TALE OF MANY CITIES One longtime subscriber was disappointed with Michael Rosenfeld's "Jerusalem by the Book" (May 2012). "I traveled to Israel in 2006. I enjoyed most of your feature, but

it is tiresome to read another article quoting only Israeli Jews and Palestinians who criticize Israeli treatment of Palestinians," wrote Janet Cohen of **Marietta, Ga.** "Where are the Palestinians who dare to criticize anything Palestinian, or to praise anything Israeli or Jewish?"

BREAKING THE ICE Costas Christ's column about Antarctic travel (Tales From the Frontier, March-April 2012) prompted discussion. "No question that climate change is the most serious issue confronting polar environments in the 21st century; however, carbon emissions aren't prone to being compartmentalized," writes Steve Wellmeier of the **International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators**, who was quoted in the article. "The carbon footprint of visitors to any popular vacation area has a much bigger consequence on the warming trends in Antarctica than the 30,000 visitors actually going there."

TALK TO US E-MAIL: TRAVEL_TALK@NGS.ORG. TWITTER: @NATGEOTRAVELER FACEBOOK: NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELER. LETTERS: TRAVEL TALK EDITOR, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELER, 1145 17TH ST. N.W. WASHINGTON, DC 20036-4688. INCLUDE ADDRESS AND DAYTIME TELEPHONE NUMBER. LETTERS WE PUBLISH MAY BE EXCERPTED OR EDITED. SUBSCRIBER SERVICES: NGTSERVICE.COM OR CALL 800-NGS-LINE (647-5463).

A man wearing a white shirt, a life vest, and a white cap is smiling while paddling a wooden canoe. A young girl with pigtails, wearing a purple and blue jacket, is leaning over the side of the canoe, splashing water. They are on a river with a dense forest of evergreen trees in the background. In the distance, a white RV and a car are parked on a grassy bank.

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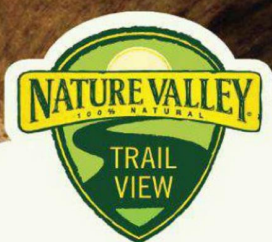
RALPH LEE HOPKINS

It was a family camping trip that first introduced me to our national parks, with the Grand Canyon having the biggest impact on me. Growing up on the East Coast I had never seen anything like it—a canyon so deep that I couldn't see the bottom. It was this childhood memory that inspired me to move west. A twist of fate landed me at Northern Arizona University, where I studied the rim rocks of the Grand Canyon for my master's degree.

Matkatamiba Canyon is one of the hidden gems and is particularly photogenic in the late afternoon when reflected light from the canyon walls illuminates the sinuous layers in the Muav Limestone. What I love most about photographing in our national parks, and the Grand Canyon in particular, is the sense of freedom and being in the moment that keeps bringing me back year after year.

MY VIEW ^{IN} Being in the Moment _{IN} Grand Canyon National Park

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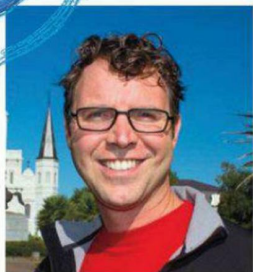
TRAVELER

*A room at
the modular
Treehotel in
Sweden.*

THE TREND

Pop Goes the World

IN ADVANCE OF the London Olympics, British Airways launched Flight BA2012, a pop-up restaurant designed like a jumbo-jet cabin, located in a Shoreditch warehouse. **Pop-ups**—temporary architecture and here-today/gone-tomorrow marketing blitzes—are now nearly everywhere. In the Netherlands, a limited-time-only “Lego church” (actually a performance space) was erected for a festival; its massive concrete blocks were painted and stacked like Legos. In Chicago, Pop-Up Art Loop stages short-lived galleries and installations. In Christchurch, New Zealand, a towering, provisional \$4 million cathedral made of cardboard will replace the city’s earthquake-damaged church by year’s end. “Instead of building urban structures that are meant to last forever, the pop-up philosophy is based on the fact that things have an end,” says Joop de Boer, co-founder of the blog Pop-Up City. So where’s the trend heading? Look for a wave of new hotels—tree rooms in Sweden, tent hotels in England—built on decentralized and modular concepts, says de Boer. —GEORGE W. STONE



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Tibetan prayer flags mark a sacred spot in Shangri-La County, where monasteries claim close ethnic ties to neighboring Tibet.



THE PLACE

Finding Shangri-La

SINCE JAMES HILTON IMAGINED **Shangri-La** in his bestselling 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*, a host of Himalayan areas have laid claim to this earthly Eden. But only one place—Zhongdian in China's southwestern Yunnan Province—has officially gone by the name Shangri-La County since 2001. The region covers a stunning land of snowcapped peaks and plunging parallel gorges carved by three of Asia's mightiest rivers. UNESCO recognized Three Parallel Rivers as a World Heritage site and called it "the epicenter of Chinese biodiversity." Despite throngs of Chinese tourists, "the area is vast, so it's easy to get away," says Sarah Ferguson of Kensington Tours, who recommends a hike in one of the national parks where rare birds such as the black-necked crane live. Another must, massive Songzanlin Monastery, is "a mini Potala Palace, with hundreds of Tibetan Buddhist monks from the Yellow Hat sect," she says. Chris Dunham of Asia Transpacific Journeys plans visits during the late summer Khampa Horse Festival, three days of celebration, song, and equestrian shows. Most travelers stay in and around Shangri-La's main city, Diqing, a former hub on the ancient tea trade route. A clutch of new hotels slated to open in the next two years includes a low-rise city resort from—you guessed it—the Shangri-La Hotel group. —CEIL MILLER BOUCHET

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Where Oslo Plays



OSLO'S QUIRKY BOROUGH along the banks of the Akerseelva River, **Grünerløkka** used to be a gritty industrial area. Now, it's where the cool kids go to shop and play. Løkka (as locals call it) brims with retro-fitted, century-old buildings, public squares, and parks. Its current cache of indie-owned boutiques, cafés, galleries, and bars exemplifies Oslo's edgy alter ego—an energetic contrast to the Norwegian capital's more reserved city center nearby. “Løkka is like a village,” says local Nina Schjeide, co-owner of the Elisa Day store. “People greet one another in the morning in the coffee shops and at night in the restaurants and bars.”

Mathallen (1) Opening in October, Oslo's first dedicated food hall will host stalls for sausage makers, bakers, coffee roasters, farmers, and fishmongers.

DogA (2) In the old transformer station, the Norwegian Centre for Design and Architecture (known as DogA) stocks its on-site shop with elf motif tableware by Wik and Walsøe and other high-design must-haves.

Markveien Mat og Vinhus (3) This nearly 30-year-old bistro serves seasonal menus that might include its signature baked halibut, complemented by a wine list singled out by *Wine Spectator*.

Popsenteret (4) The recently opened interactive museum of music celebrates Norway's pop and folk tunes and trends since 1904. Kids love the recording studios and the chance to have their photo on an album cover.

Elisa Day (5) This clothing shop is run by two seamstresses who sell (among other brands) their own hand-crafted clothing designs, from sundresses to ball gowns.

Galleri Markveien (6) Established and emerging Norwegian artists, including acclaimed abstract painter Tone Granberg Sletten, display their works here in a naturally lit showroom.

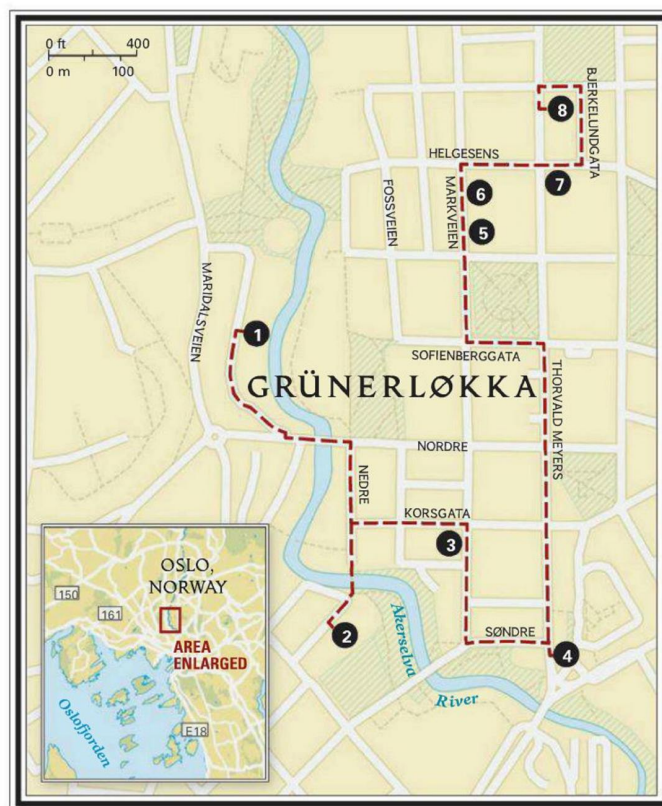
Velouria Vintage (7) The best of the many vintage shops in Grünerløkka, the small,



Take a seat: Iris Djupvik's “willow” chair exhibited at DogA (above); outdoors at one of Grünerløkka's laid-back cafés (left).

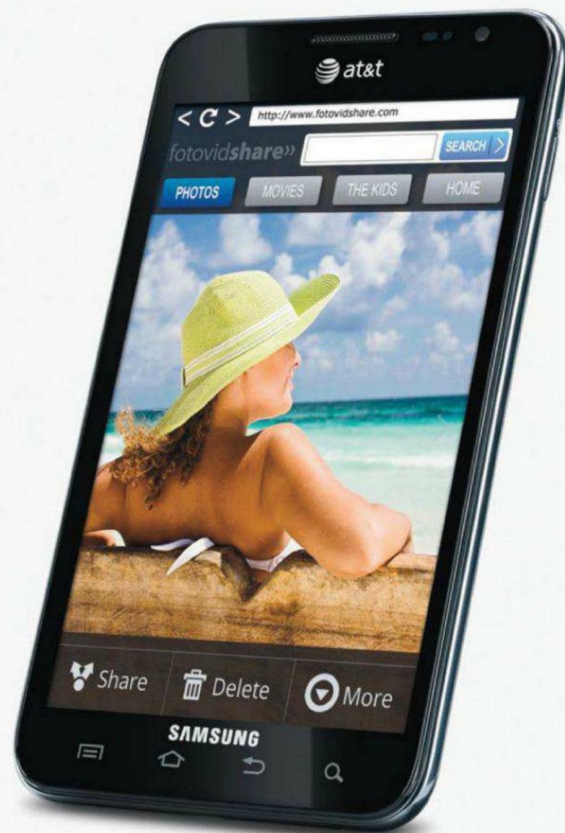
always crowded Velouria sells go-go boots, sequined tops, chunky necklaces, and clothing from the 1950s through the 1980s.

Bar Boca (8) Epicurean cocktails rule at this longtime, retro-themed watering hole. Try the Bentley: a masterly marriage of calvados and Dubonnet. —Becca Hensley



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Escape to COZUMEL



The island of Cozumel is what dreams are made of—turquoise waters and empty hammocks swinging lazily in the breeze above sugar-like sand. But Cozumel is more than just beaches. This idyllic island in the State of Quintana Roo embodies Mexico's history and culture, while providing ample opportunities for adventure. Travelers of all types are sure to find their little piece of heaven here.

Cozumel became a celebrated diving destination after Jacques Cousteau deemed its coral reefs one of the world's best places for underwater exploration. Due to the geographical position of the island, the waters are protected from the open ocean and host a vibrant sea life. Above-water adventures include kayaking, windsurfing, and golfing at one of the island's gems: the **Cozumel Country Club golf course**. The Jack Nicklaus—designed course also serves as an Audubon-certified bird sanctuary.

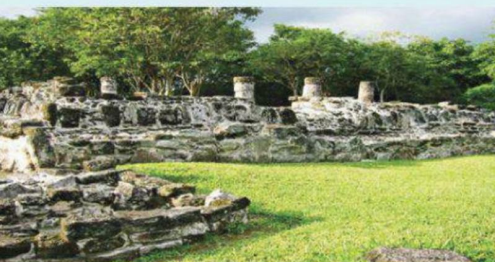
The **San Gervasio archaeological site** was once a place of pilgrimage where Mayan women paid tribute to the goddess of love and fertility, Ix Chel. Fragments of the site still stand, offering a glimpse into ancient Mayan life. A contemporary destination for romance is the picturesque **Passion Island**—a perfect spot for a beach wedding or honeymoon. The **Discover Mexico theme park** is a cultural and historical one-stop featuring replicas of famous

sites, ruins, and colonial buildings. Located in a former luxury hotel in downtown **San Miguel**, the **Cozumel Museum** highlights the island's natural history and modern origins.

At the southernmost point of Cozumel, visit the 247-acre **Punta Sur Ecological Park**, where you'll find protected sea turtle nesting sites as well as a maritime museum and historic lighthouse with panoramic views of the coves that early Mayan—and notorious pirate Jean Lafitte—once navigated. The beautiful **Chankanaab National Park** was created to protect fauna and flora but also offers the unforgettable experience of swimming with dolphins!

Though Cozumel is the closest Caribbean island to many major U.S. cities, its tranquil landscape will make you feel as though you're on your own private paradise.

Visit www.cozumel.travel to plan your next escape.



BOTTOM (from left to right): The San Gervasio ruins; a wedding on Passion Island; Cozumel lighthouse in Punta Sur Ecological Park and Hawksbill Turtle
TOP: Kayaking over the calm waters of Cozumel (top left); Cozumel Country Club golf course (bottom left); snorkeling in the protected waters of Cozumel (top right); bicycling on the quiet roads that circle the island (bottom right)

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THE MILESTONE

For the Birds

SEPTEMBER 27 marks the **50th anniversary of *Silent Spring***, Rachel Carson's warning against chemical pesticides that's credited with launching the modern environmental movement. Opening with a fable of a chemical-choked world where birds no longer sang, the nonfiction book helped inspire the U.S. ban on toxic DDT and the 1970 creation of the Environmental Protection Agency. Conservation-minded travelers can pay homage to the "prophetic voice," as admirers have described Carson, at her newly renovated birthplace in Springdale, Pennsylvania, where she first witnessed the toll of industrial pollution on her childhood swimming spot, the Allegheny River. Visitors can also experience the environmentalist's influence at the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge in Wells, Maine, near where she conducted research. There nature lovers enjoy pristine beaches and salt marshes and listen to the cries of Canada geese and red-tailed hawks—poignant reminders that Carson's echo can be heard anywhere birds still call. —CORINNE WHITING



Rachel Carson (center) with Audubon Society bird-watchers at a D.C. park in 1962.

THE PERSON

Consumer Reports

YOU COULD ACCUSE **Christopher Elliott** of building a career out of causing trouble. That's his business: In addition to serving as this magazine's ombudsman (see *The Insider*, page 34), the onetime scuba instructor tirelessly advocates for travelers as the co-founder of the D.C.-based Consumer Travel Alliance and as the author of *Scammed*. Through his website, *Elliott.org*, he helps readers solve trip woes, from mysterious cruise fees to car rental rip-offs. When he's not making corporate enemies? These days Elliott is road-tripping across the U.S. with his family, blogging as they go.

What bugs you most about travel providers? The cheapness of some online travel agencies astounds me—that they would take all of their

call centers offshore and have these people half a world away who don't understand the customer at all, and who respond to every question by reading from a script. Cutting back on customer service is no way to save money. As for hotels, there's been a move recently to make room rates less—or not—refundable. And car rental companies seem to thrive by going after every damage claim.

What's your indispensable road gear? If the choice were between my checked bag or my iPhone, I would let the bag go. You can always buy new clothes. But my phone is my essential reporting tool.

Is travel getting worse? Some say it's getting better: Travel is more affordable, more people can fly. But others say, look at the way we're treated when

we have a service problem. I put up a poll on my website recently asking this question, and 93 percent of my readers said it's getting worse. I'm probably with them. Then again, sometimes I hear outrageous complaints from consumers who have done all the wrong things, who come across entitled. Unfortunately, those folks probably deserve the treatment they get.

What's your solution? To vote with our wallets. It's fair to assume that a \$9 fare isn't going to cover all of a company's costs, so you can—and maybe should—expect service to suffer. Being willing to pay more reasonable rates might encourage better treatment. It's an uphill struggle. Companies say the best consumer is the informed consumer, but they don't mean it. What they want is for us to buy their products without thinking.

—Keith Bellows

Christopher Elliott at his home airport in Orlando, Florida.





THE EXHIBIT On the Rocks

Painter Winslow Homer once discouraged visitors to his Maine studio by warning of snakes and mice. Starting September 25, enthusiasts can book guided tours (\$55). To celebrate the opening, the Portland Art Museum will show 35 works created there in **"Weatherbeaten: Winslow Homer and Maine"** (September 22–December 30). "He saw the studio as a camera," says Dana Baldwin of the museum, which recently renovated the landmark on tiny Prouts Neck. There Homer depicted scenes such as "The Outlook" (above), in which women brace against the coastal wind. —*Janelle Nanos*

Chattanooga!

THE IDEA Just Our Type

City branding isn't new: Rome had its she-wolf; Athens its owl. But a **typeface as civic identity?** Two designers in Chattanooga, Tennessee, claim to have created the first U.S. typeface inspired by its home and also intended for (free) citywide proliferation. Called Chatype, its design takes cues ranging from the Cherokee alphabet to a Chattanooga footbridge and is the latest sign of creative renewal in the 19th-century railroad boomtown (find more bright spots at the galleries and restaurants on Southside's Main Street). The designers hope Chatype will soon be ubiquitous, from bike lanes to street banners. —*Alissa Walker*

THE TASTE

California Milk Run

THE NEW **Sonoma Marin Cheese Trail** winds about a hundred miles through the redwood canyons, pastures, and oak-covered hills of Marin and Sonoma counties just north of San Francisco. It links more than two dozen artisans who make distinctive cheeses using local milk from grass-fed cows, sheep, and goats. "The milk's just sweeter," says Gabe Luddy, great-grandson of Vella Cheese Company's founder in Sonoma. "Our climate and temperature make a difference." The area looks nearly unchanged since 1865 when Marin French Cheese Company began making semisoft breakfast cheese for San Francisco's dockworkers. Now the company crafts 20 varieties in its factory near Petaluma. Visitors can tour the plant, buy savory wedges on-site, and picnic overlooking a duck pond. At Point Reyes Farmstead Cheese Company, the Fork education center offers an all-day, hands-on cheesemaking class. Nick's Cove in Marshall serves Point Reyes Farmstead cheeses so guests can indulge without putting on that apron. In Point Reyes Station, Cowgirl Creamery provides cheese classes, tours, and tastings (try the vermilion-rinded Red Hawk) and runs a tempting deli counter. —*APRIL ORCUTT*



Barinaga Ranch makes cheese from the milk of sheep pastured on the east shore of Tomaes Bay.

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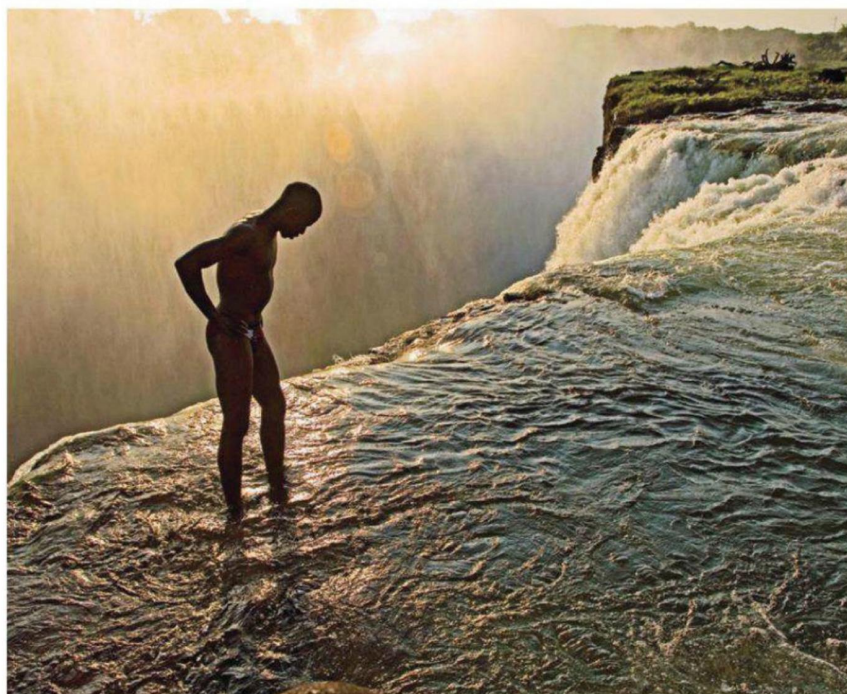
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STORY BEHIND THE SHOT



Victoria Falls, Zambia

“Even in active, thrilling situations, surprisingly quiet moments can take place. I captured this swimmer standing at the lip of Victoria Falls in Zambia after shooting dozens of pictures that afternoon. Suddenly, as the sun began to set and we were about to leave, there was this magical moment of contemplation. Capturing an intimate moment is perhaps the greatest challenge in photography—it must be earned through patience, trust, and perseverance. The beauty of this moment is made more memorable by the dramatic setting and light. Often, it is the unplanned image that ends up being the strongest. Photographers try to spend as much time as possible with their subjects, knowing that wonderful images will often result.”

National Geographic
photographer
Annie Griffiths



Legendary National Geographic photographer **Annie Griffiths** has worked on dozens of magazine and book projects in more than a hundred countries. You can learn from Annie and other acclaimed National Geographic pros at our photography seminars. See a complete list of topics and locations at nationalgeographic.com/ngtseminars

DAISANN McLANE

*Disaster Strikes—
and Still I Go*

THE TOURISM OFFICE, like the snack bars in Fukushima's train station, is stuffy in the summer heat. Four months after Japan's devastating 2011 earthquake and tsunami, the government is asking businesses to cut their electricity consumption by at least 15 percent to save precious energy; most are patriotically overcompensating. Yet there is megawatt power in the smile of the woman at the tourism desk when a lone customer saunters in from the bullet train. ¶ *"Trasshaimase! Welcome!"* she sings out, and I smile back. The office is filled with maps, leaflets—and a cutout of a rabbit character: the snow bunny Momorin, Fukushima's tourism

mascot. Walls are covered with posters showing trees in springtime, their buds exploding like popcorn into pink and fuchsia blossoms.

"Some years, our cherry and peach trees bloom at the same time," the tourism clerk tells me. "It is quite beautiful to see. Our peaches are famously juicy."

But will anyone be eating them this year? I bite my tongue to keep that awkward thought from slipping out. Fukushima, on the island of Honshu, is now forever famous, though not, sadly, for peaches. Still, the site of the nuclear meltdown lies miles from where I am, and the no-go area is just a small circle on the map of this, Japan's third largest prefecture, almost the size of Connecticut.

"New England in summer," I think as the rental van winds into the mountains above Fukushima City. Lush fruit orchards fade to cool, pine-covered slopes. In the blue sky I spot traces of white plumes—not smoke or nuclear debris but thermal steam from the 130 hot springs that bubble up from Fukushima's restless land.

I'm traveling, literally, on shaky ground. Still, I feel lucky to be here now. Many travelers, upon hearing that something has gone wrong in the destination they're headed to, move quickly to switch reservations, abandon vacations. But when I hear bad news about a destination, I resist instantly reaching for the phone to cancel my flights. I do my research, gather as many facts as I can. Then, more often than not, I stick to my plans and keep going.

Natural disasters, economic collapse, social upheavals—as much as we may prefer our dream destinations to remain unchanging and picture-perfect (like the tourist office posters), they can't. Would we really want to live and travel in such a dull, airbrushed world? Certainly, I don't want to be a burden by parachuting my traveling self into countries that are dealing with immediate life-and-death situations. (In 2005, although I was in the area, I steered clear of southern Thailand's beaches right after the tsunami, knowing that whatever precious food, water, and shelter were available needed to go to the relief effort, not tourists.)

But there's a window after the critical emergency has passed—and before its shadow has been erased. This pause of breath as disaster fades and real life resumes may last for weeks or months; if I have a chance to visit a new place during that in-between period, I grab it. Traveling after disaster can be a challenge: The electricity may be spotty; the trains may not run on time—or there may be no trains at all. Yet it's the very lack of certainty that makes this such a rich and rewarding moment to travel. When I do, I'm always happy I didn't cancel those tickets and go somewhere else.

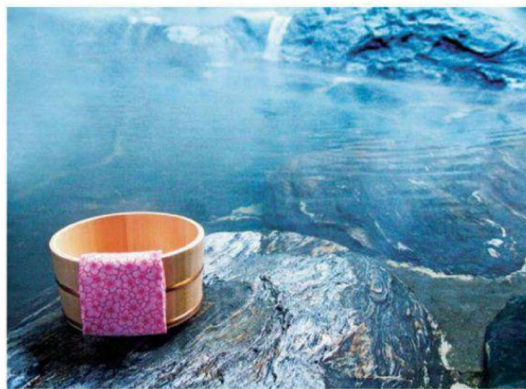
Some budget travel guides suggest "disaster" travel as a way to stretch your dollars. While it's true that the flight of tourists often

leads to more deals, I prefer to focus on the flip side of the equation. When you travel to a place that has had an unfortunate spell, you can be certain that every dollar you spend is going to people who need and appreciate it. I spent two weeks on the island of Bali just after the 2002 terrorist bombings of two discos. At first, I felt I had made a mistake: The international headlines had scared almost everyone away and turned the resorts into ghost towns. But soon I found myself surrounded—by grateful Balinese. After the first day, I stopped counting the thank-yous, the exhortations to "please tell everyone that we're OK and they can come back."

Another advantage in daring to go boldly where most travelers won't is that you have the place pretty much to yourself, a huge treat in this ever more crowded world. On Bali's north coast at sunrise I awoke to my hosts personally bringing breakfast and fresh flowers to my room; because I was one of only two guests, they had extra time for such niceties, and for me. At sunset I walked along a beach that, for once, really was as profoundly peaceful and deserted as those in the travel posters.

Because of my experience with traveling in tender times, I knew I'd need to tread softly and courteously on my trip through Japan last summer, in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami. But I didn't even consider not going.

In the Fukushima mountains, I eased myself into one of the hot springs alongside two elderly women who had been evacuated, they told me in halting English, from a village mostly swept away by the enormous waves. We lay in the steamy water, enjoying the smell of the pines, admiring the moon. Next year, if I'm lucky, I'll return to try the peaches. ■



On the rebound: Fukushima and its hot springs.

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MONTANA

SHAPED BY GLACIERS.

Double Falls, Glacier National Park

AN INTERVIEW WITH PAUL RAPPAPORT

FIELD PROGRAM COORDINATOR, GLACIER INSTITUTE

Paul Rappaport has a pretty cool job: teaching people about the workings of one of the world's most incredible places, Glacier National Park in Montana. Plus, he gets to live there.

He recently sat down with veteran Montana journalist Scott McMillion to talk about his life and his work as field camp director of the non-profit Glacier Institute.

McMillion: Tell me about the Glacier Institute.

Rappaport: We teach courses on plants, wildlife, glacial geology, climate change. For instance, with a five day course, we'll start out with geology, then soils, plant communities, then wildlife and the ways all those things relate. Or we can customize a course, if your group is interested in something like wildfire ecology.

SM: Who teaches the courses?

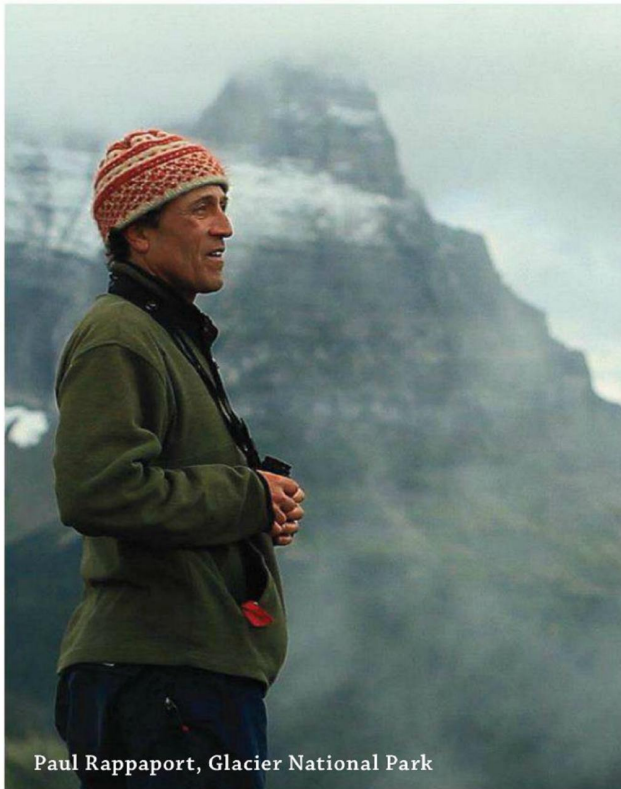
PR: We hire professional instructors, people with advanced degrees who have worked in the area for a long time.

SM: Do you see a lot of bears?

PR: I saw 83 last season. But we have lots of other wildlife. You're almost guaranteed to see mountain goats and bighorn sheep, plus deer and elk and moose. And while I'm not going to promise you'll see a wolverine, I've spotted five or six of them.

SM: There's incredible biodiversity here.

PR: In Glacier, maritime weather comes in from the Pacific and meets a polar weather system, kind of a dry Alberta Clipper thing. And those weather systems kind of duke it out here. Plus, there's a lot of elevation, about 7,000 feet of vertical. Put it all together and it creates a lot of different habitats.



Paul Rappaport, Glacier National Park



Avalanche Creek, Glacier National Park

SM: You make it sound like a melting pot, or maybe a blending pot.

PR: In a nutshell, the flora and fauna of the northern Rockies meet the Great Plains, the central Rockies and the Pacific Northwest. We have the southernmost limit of arctic bellflowers, for example, the easternmost limit of cedar/hemlock groves and the westernmost limit of some prairie grasses.

SM: How should people take it all in?

PR: Throw in an extra day or two. And plan ahead. Backcountry campsites are limited but you can make reservations in advance for a fee, which is a good idea if you want a specific campsite on a specific night. Educate yourself about where you want to go in Glacier National Park and what you want to see. Since we've got daylight from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. in the summer, you can pack a lot into a day. And once you're a mile off the highway, you've left 90 percent of the people behind.

SM: You're a geologist. That must have taken you to a lot of interesting places.

PR: I've worked in Antarctica and Scandinavia and Colorado. I've been to Alaska and Patagonia and Peru, backpacking and bicycling. Now I live in Glacier.

SM: You're a lucky guy.

PR: I'm an educator, not just a manager walking around with keys and duct tape, though I do that, too. I'm here because I have a passion for nature and an ability to share it with a wide variety of people. So, yes, I'm very lucky to be here.

SM: Any final advice?

PR: Don't forget your binoculars. That little dot you see way out there? It just might be a bull moose.

View more about Paul and Glacier National Park at VISITMT.COM/MONTANA-STORIES

BOYD MATSON

Jumping to Conclusions

I'M IN SOUTHERN AFRICA at the intersection of what I call “the boulevard of z’s,” the stretch of the Zambezi River where zebras drink and Zimbabwe and Zambia rub shoulders. Staring at spectacular Victoria Falls from a footpath in Zambia, I’m close enough to feel the spray but far enough away to appreciate the enormity of the scene as the Zambezi, helpless against gravity, becomes a foaming sheet of water a little over a mile wide. I’m walking along a path that parallels the contours of the gorge 350 feet below, lost in thought about Mother Nature’s might. Suddenly, my meditation dissolves, interrupted by the sight of a man headed straight toward the edge of the falls. Clearly he’s

a lunatic, suicidal—or a daredevil without a barrel. I’m leaning toward option number one since he appears oblivious to danger, even as he climbs a rock formation that protrudes about three feet out of the river. (Trying to get a better view?) And then he jumps.

I stare in disbelief, expecting to see his helpless body come tumbling over the edge. Except it doesn’t. About a minute later, he scrambles back up to the same rocky outcrop. This time he adds a back flip to his death-defying leap of faith. Now I’m sure he’s crazy. I ask some bystanders, “Is that guy nuts, or is that precarious spot three feet from the edge of Victoria Falls really the local swimming hole?”

“That’s the Devil’s Pool,” they tell me, explaining that when water levels are lower (roughly September to December), a rock barrier in the river forms a pool where people can swim. Apparently a nook on the inside of that rock wall is known as the Devil’s Armchair. People can sit on the underwater “chair,” lean back, relax, and peek over the edge. There’s only minimal current in the pool, which means no one should get swept over, as people would if they were 15 to 20 feet to either side. As to the other part of my question: “Yes, that guy’s probably a little crazy,” one of the locals replies. “People have slipped and gone over the edge to their death. Not often, but it’s happened. I wouldn’t do it,” he adds. Since my trip is almost over, I have an immediate realization: I’ve got to come back and try this.

Five years later, I’m back, it’s the dry season, and a dunk in the Devil’s Pool is on the agenda. David Livingstone, the first European to see the falls (he’s the guy who named them for Queen Victoria), described their beauty by writing, “Scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight.” I’m no angel, so I charter a Microlight aircraft to take me up for the aerial view—and to see the big picture that Livingstone could only imagine. But I’m not up here just for a beauty shot. I’m curious to see the shallow waters where the river widens in front of the falls, the area where I will take a dip in the Devil’s Pool tomorrow. I’m looking for crocodiles, which are known to patrol the Zambezi in large numbers farther upstream. I don’t see any, which confirms what I’ve been told, that the animals are too concerned about going over the falls to get that close to the edge. On one hand, their absence is comforting. But it’s also concerning, a reminder that even their little reptilian brains are warning them to stay away.

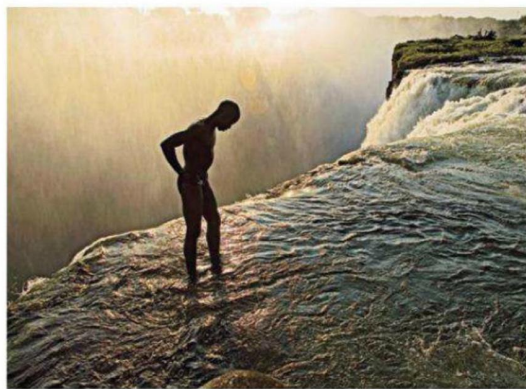
The next morning, ignoring the instincts of the crocs, we go to Livingstone Island, the same place the locals took David Livingstone for his first look at the falls in 1855. Guides lead us to an area where we can safely swim to the rocks that constitute one side of the Devil’s Pool. As we’re swimming, we still can’t see the falls, even

though they are only a hundred yards or so in front of us. The escarpment is so flat, the drop at the gorge so sudden, that it looks as if we’re in the world’s most thrilling infinity pool. What we can see are the plumes of spray rising from the water where it explodes at the bottom of the gorge, and we hear the roar, too—sights and sounds that gave the falls their original name, Mosi-oa-Tunya, or “the smoke that thunders.”

A disquieting thought keeps flashing through my mind: What if we get caught in a surprise current that sweeps us over the edge? But then I see the vista, framed by a brilliant rainbow, and think, “This is going to be a day to remember forever.” We finally reach the

rocks and walk to the spot I saw being used as a jumping-off point by that “crazy” guy five years earlier. Now it’s my turn.

A guide is sitting on the wall that forms the top edge of the falls. Behind him is nothing but emptiness. The message is clear: Jump, but not too far. So I vault myself, spinning, trying to take in as much as possible of this moment in time. I see the falls, the rainbow, the river. I’m pretty sure this must be the ultimate way to see Victoria Falls, an even better vantage than Livingstone’s angels had. As I swim over to the wall, it dawns on me: Sitting in the Devil’s Armchair is, as it were, a little slice of heaven on Earth. You might think heaven can wait. But if you’re a little bit crazy, and it’s the dry season, add the Devil’s Pool to your agenda. It may just be the world’s most spectacular swimming hole. ■



View from the top: Devil’s Pool at Victoria Falls.

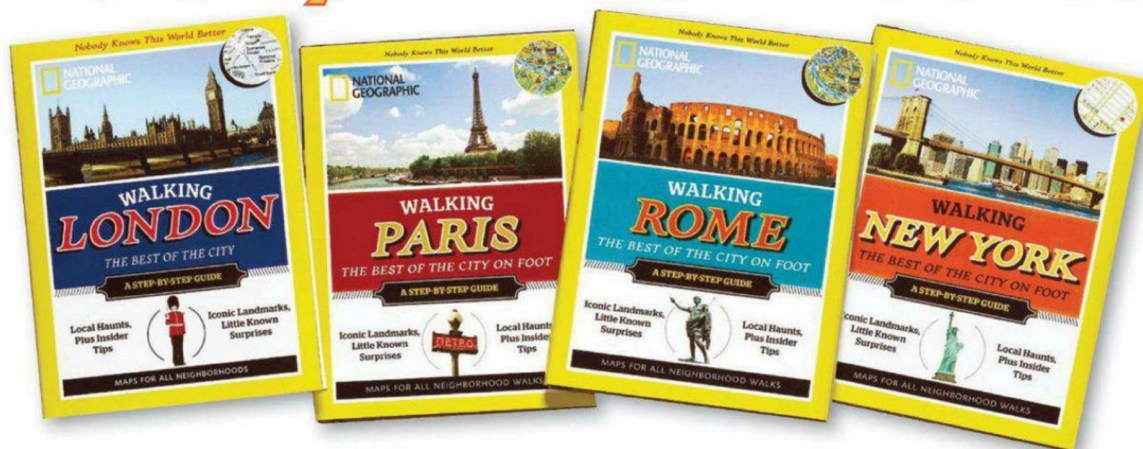


On Our iPad Edition: Watch a video of Boyd Matson swimming in the Devil’s Pool atop Victoria Falls, in southern Africa’s Zambezi River. Available for download from the App Store.

BOYD MATSON *hosts* National Geographic Weekend on the radio.

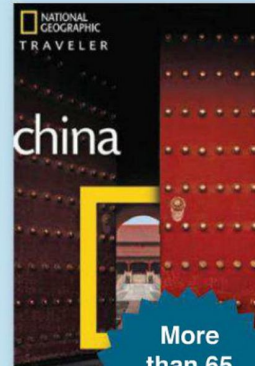
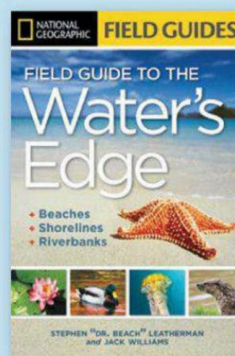
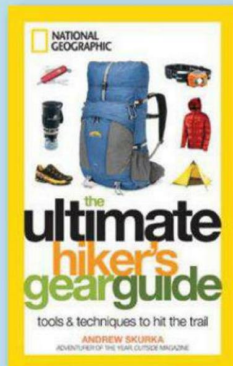
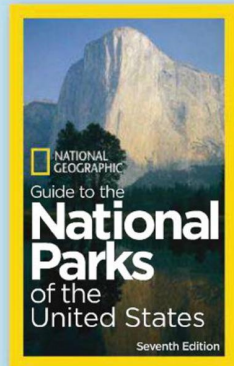
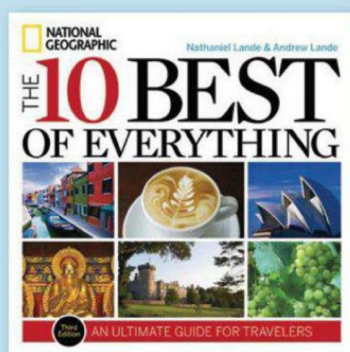


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CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT

Know Your Erroneous Zones

TO TRAVEL IS TO MAKE MISTAKES. Taking a trip, by definition, involves new destinations, new experiences—and new errors. As your ombudsman, I have a front-row seat to your vacation snafus. But here's something I've noticed: Many mistakes aren't new. They're recycled. Knowing of them could prevent problems down the road. So here are the most frequently repeated screw-ups culled from more than two decades of consumer advocacy.¶ The first:

Wiring money to strangers. Bad idea, right? Heck, your mother probably warned you against it. But who can remember Mom's advice when someone dangles a deal in your face? Here's how one

current version works: A victim finds a vacation rental online, e-mails the owner, and negotiates a sweetheart deal. But payment must be wired immediately. It happened to Kathryn Bowden, a portrait artist who lives in Sorrento, Florida. The bargain she found on a rental in Kissimmee through Home Away.com was simply too good to pass up (\$3,800 instead of \$4,500). So she wired the cash to the owner, who lived in England. Someone appears to have replicated the real owner's e-mail account, assumed his identity, and then funneled the money to the thief's account. With a click, Bowden lost almost four grand. "It was a fabulous house," she says regretfully, adding that she wishes she'd paid with a credit card and been able to speak to the real owner by phone before booking.

2. Waiting until the last minute to review your itinerary. Tiffany Purcell, a teacher from West Palm Beach, Florida, noticed a problem with her ticket when she arrived at the airport. Somehow, her fiancé's last name had become her last name. And no, she hadn't tied the knot. Their airline, United, forced her to buy two one-way tickets under her correct name. If she'd reviewed her flight details when she received them, the error might have been corrected. It takes less than ten seconds to read the name and date on your ticket. As soon as you receive confirmation of your ticket, take the time to review it carefully.

3. Pushing the "buy" button more than once. Holly Johnson tried

to book a ticket from Boston to Madison through Expedia. The first attempt failed—or so she thought. "I got an error screen," says the college student. She tried again and ended up with two tickets. If you get an error message when booking online and/or don't receive a confirmation e-mail after several minutes, call the customer service number to find out if your transaction went through.

4. Not getting the terms of your international cell phone plan in writing. By now, most travelers know to turn off their cell phones when abroad or purchase an international plan to avoid the highest rates. Joyce Simon, an accountant from Chicago, thought she'd signed up for such a plan when she and her husband visited French Polynesia last year. Over the phone, an AT&T representative had assured her they were covered. "After a few days, we started getting text messages on our phones warning us that our data use was extremely high," she says. A \$3,364 bill awaited them when they returned. Fortunately, her husband had noted the name of the representative, and the phone company eventually adjusted the Simons' bill. Avoid the hassle: Get any changes in writing, or better yet, power the phone down except in emergencies. (Do you really need to be wired up while in Bora-Bora?)

5. Assuming that because your travel agent or tour operator said so, your documents must be in order. Becky and David Hovis asked a representative from Carnival Cruise Lines if they needed passports for their Caribbean cruise and were told they didn't—any government-issued ID would do. But when they arrived at the port in Tampa, Florida, the cruise line said they did need passports after all and denied them boarding. "I talked to a manager," says Becky Hovis. "No luck." The couple missed their honeymoon cruise. Had they checked with the State Department, they would have known that a driver's license wasn't enough to leave the country. Unfortunately, it was up to them, not Carnival, to make sure their paperwork was in order.

6. Believing you won a "free" cruise. Reader Henry Baumgaertel contacted me after he responded to one of these bogus offers. "Usually, I ignore them," he said, "but this one had the logo of a well-known cruise line." When he phoned to claim his prize, he was told he had to attend a time-share presentation and pay \$288 in "port taxes" and a \$49 fee to make the reservation. And that's inevitably how it goes. Ditto for travel clubs that promise deep discounts in exchange for an annual fee. My advice? Toss these come-ons into the recycling bin without giving them a second thought.

There's one more thing I've learned from years of hearing about trips gone wrong: Sometimes a mistake turns what would have been a perfectly ordinary trip into a memorable experience you will talk about at cocktail parties for years to come. Remember the Hovises? Their Caribbean cruise turned into a honeymoon in Tampa, which has no shortage of beaches and cultural attractions. And after I contacted Carnival on their behalf, it agreed to offer the honeymooners a do-over cruise. And the story they have? Priceless. ■



Are your papers in order? Check before traveling.

CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT addresses readers' travel problems. E-mail your story to celliott@ngs.org.

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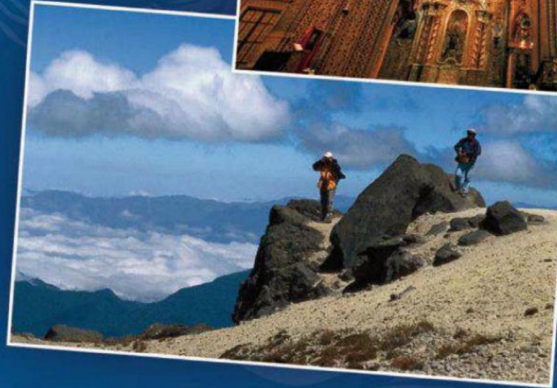
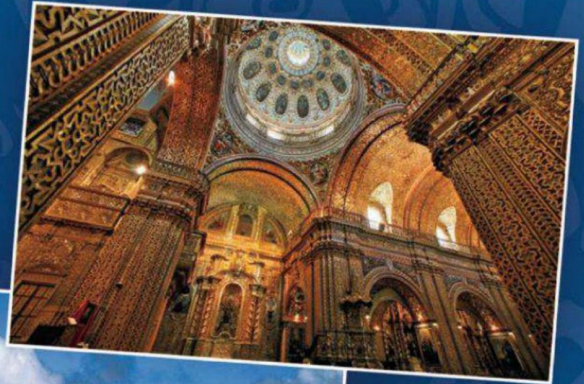
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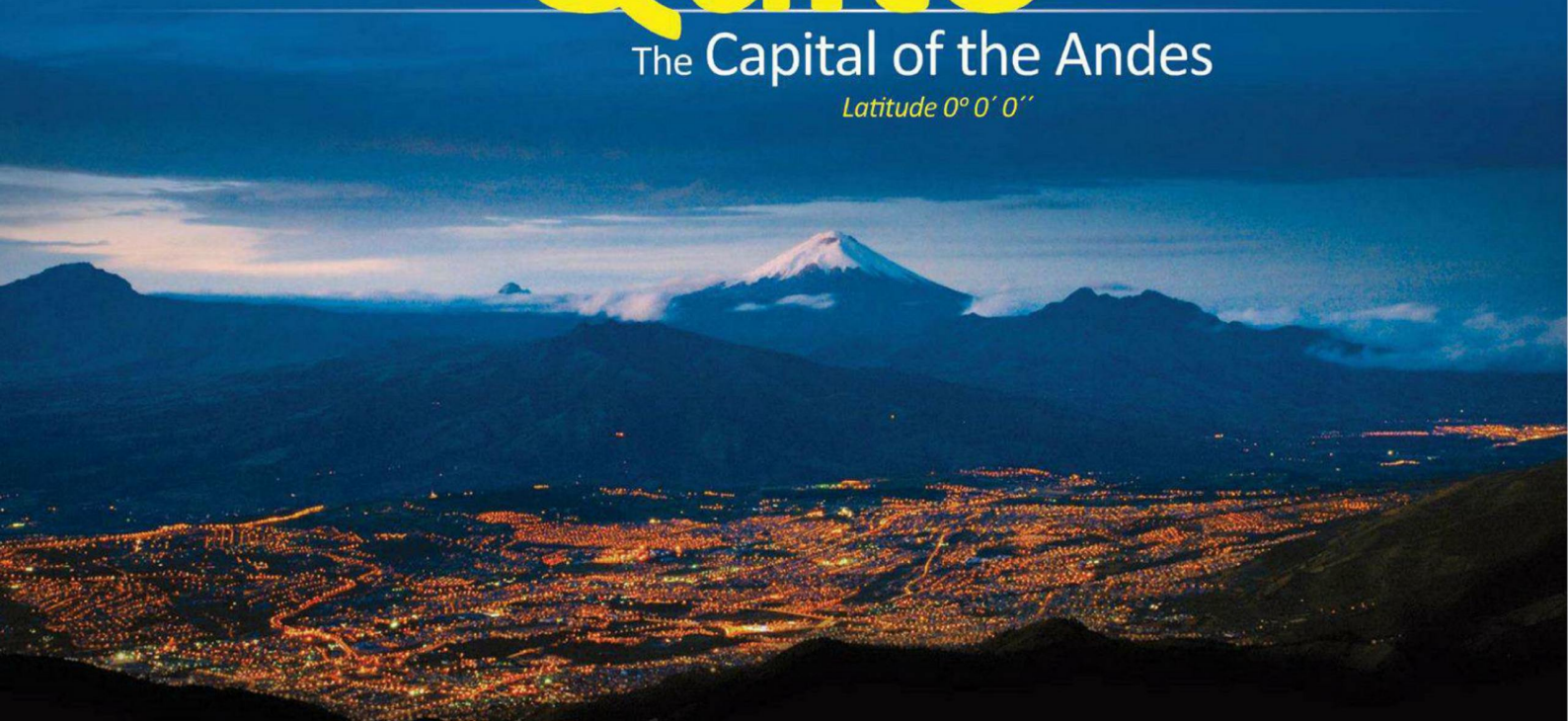
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COLONIAL SHOWPIECE, MODERN CAPITAL

Set amid snow-topped Andean peaks, the 9,350-foot-high city holds a dazzling array of cultural and entertainment offerings. Start in the extensive **historic center**, where must-see sites include the spectacular **La Compañía de Jesús Church**, built by Jesuits in 1605; Casa del Alabado, one of Latin America's most important repositories of pre-Columbian art; and the Moorish-influenced **San Francisco Church**, dating from 1534 and boasting the iconic Virgin of Quito sculpture. Elsewhere, colonial house museums, themselves worthy architectural landmarks, showcase historical events and contemporary art collections.

Not simply a museum, the historic center keeps deep-rooted traditions alive with the ongoing work of hatters, tinkers, confectioners, stoneworkers, barbers, seamstresses, and other artisans. Roam cobblestoned streets such as charming **La Ronda** and be transported

back in time. After hours, check out Quito's vibrant nightlife in fashionable **La Mariscal**, home to some of the city's best restaurants, cafés, and lounges. Known as La Zona, this thriving district is where locals and visitors create a brew of cultures and languages, and, the heart of it all, **Plaza Foch** buzzes with youthful energy.

THE LAND BEYOND

North of the city center, visit the middle of the world at **Mitad del Mundo** and straddle the line joining Northern and Southern Hemispheres. Also just minutes from the city center, find yourself surrounded by nature in rural Quito and enjoy treks and adventure sports amid a backdrop of waterfalls, lakes, and **Cloud Forest**. The 33 parishes of greater Quito offer an array of cultural and natural experiences; elevations vary from 1,600 to 15,700 feet, creating tremendous biodiversity.

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COSTAS CHRIST

Lessons From the Grand Canyon

IT'S SUNRISE AND I'M HUFFING along the South Kaibab Trail as it descends into the mile-deep chasm known as the Grand Canyon. I've come to America's most celebrated sequence of eroded rock, in all its gold and crimson glory, to celebrate an anniversary of sorts. This is the first national park I ever visited, as a high schooler on a solo quest for adventure. For the 16-year-old me, it was love at first hike in the canyon's million-acre wilderness. Now, older and wiser, I am on a sentimental journey back to the place where my love affair with national parks began.¶ The concept of a national park was born in the U.S.A. 140 years ago, when President Ulysses S. Grant signed Yellowstone into law, setting a

major conservation-for-the-people precedent that today includes 58 parks. The idea took off, and national parks have since been established in nearly every country and continent. But succeeding in the National Park Service mission of "preserving unimpaired our natural and cultural resources...for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations" has not been easy. There have been many challenges along the way. The Grand Canyon—among the most venerable and beloved of parks—offers some valuable, hard-earned lessons. It's older and wiser too.

Lesson One: Don't build tourist facilities right next to your star attractions. Driven largely by moneymaking interests eager to feed on a growing stream of visitors, a frenzy of construction took off along the scenic rim of the Grand Canyon between 1966 and 1983. The resulting hodgepodge of parking lots, convenience stores, curio shops, restaurants, hotels, and campgrounds is a notable contrast to nature's architecture. (This isn't just a Grand Canyon problem, by the way.) Rather than allow a new trinket outlet at Grand Canyon Village, park officials in 2009 appropriately turned the curio shop that stood there into an educational center for visitors.

Confront big business: Corporate influence seeps into every slice of American life, and our national parks are no exception. After Grand Canyon park staff determined that plastic water bottles were the biggest source of litter (generating a whopping 20

to 30 percent of all park trash), it prepared to institute a ban on January 1, 2011—opting for refilling stations and reusable water bottles instead. The policy was sound, sensible, and—once Coca-Cola heard about it—controversial. The ban was too big a gulp to swallow for the soft-drink giant (which owns Dasani water and is a major donor to the National Park Foundation). Just days before its start date, the ban was scuttled. It was later revealed that Coke had expressed "concerns" behind the scenes, leading Steve Martin, the park's superintendent, to raise questions about whether park policy was being unduly influenced by big business. It took another year before the park prevailed and the ban went into effect. Parks owe it to the people to push back on corporate interests where they might cause harm.

Cut the cars: Like the rest of America, Grand Canyon National Park has accommodated a car culture that is proving unsustainable, harmful, and unsightly. The summer afternoon traffic jams at scenic turnouts and overflowing parking lots were threatening to destroy the natural experience. After park officials warned of "a dysfunctional transportation system with two-hour waits at the entrance and chaotic parking along the South Rim," traffic was reconfigured and a new shuttle bus transit center opened in 2011, resulting in less traffic congestion. Note to new parks: Design with a public transportation system from the outset.

Make friends: Underfunded national parks cannot go it alone. They need engaged partners—local communities, municipalities, nonprofit groups, and visitors—to further their mission. "Partnerships bring expertise, talent, and volunteer service to support park staff, and can raise needed funds for conservation. They are essential to the future of the parks system," says Todd Koenigs, executive director of Global Parks, a volunteer organization of veteran conservationists working to strengthen national park systems worldwide. In the Grand Canyon, those

partners have volunteered to help remove invasive plants (over four million since 2009) in order to restore natural habitat and save native species, and a partnership with Arizona Public Service led to the installation of solar panels that provide 30 percent of the energy needs for the visitors center. Grand Canyon Youth, a local group based in Flagstaff, supports scientific research and environmental awareness, helping to inspire a new generation to safeguard the park. Call them friends with conservation benefits.

By the time I reach the footbridge across the Colorado River, the day-trippers have thinned and I dip my feet into the icy water—just as I did when I first hiked this trail more than three decades ago. The Grand Canyon, like other early national parks, has weathered more than just wind and rain since its establishment in 1919. Surely there are more challenges to come. It occurs to me that even our "protected areas" are never totally safe. That travelers must remain engaged and vigilant is probably the most important lesson of all. There is a national park near you that needs a friend. ■



A controversy erupted over plastic in the park.

COSTAS CHRIST writes about the changing world of travel. E-mail him through Travel_Talk@ngs.org.

Seoul Searching

FINDING THE AUTHENTIC IN SOUTH KOREA'S CAPITAL

By JONATHAN HOPFNER

SEOUL HAS LONG been painted as the unknown quantity among Asia's megacities, at most a stop-over for travelers on their way to somewhere with more cachet. But that portrayal looks increasingly outdated for a place starting to set trends. In the past few years the South Korean capital has hosted high-profile events such as the G-20 summit, won accolades for its design savvy, and flooded overseas markets with high-end Samsung smart phones and sleek Hyundai cars (not to mention its polished pop culture).

The city of ten-million-plus residents is both investing in the future and riding a

resurgence of tradition. Seoul's newfound fortune has also brought with it a diversity that would have been unimaginable even a decade ago.

Seoul "is becoming much more sophisticated as Koreans who grew up in a prosperous, democratic society get older," says Seoul National University professor Robert J. Fouser. "It's also friendly. At times, it feels like an overgrown small town."

The best time to experience Seoul is now, before this former underdog gets too comfortable in the global spotlight.

WHAT TO DO While much is made of Seoul's headlong dash to development, a celebrated past still lives on in its stately royal palaces. Here the country's kings and queens resided until Korea's occupation by neighboring Japan in the early 20th century hastened

Traditional homes line a lane in the Bukchon neighborhood.

the demise of the monarchy. The largest palace, **Gyeongbokgung**, has sat at the foot of Mount Bugak for over 600 years, as old as the capital itself. Fronted by the towering, radiantly colored **Gwanghwamun** gate, it's a sprawling network of pavilions, passageways, and courtyards. At its center lies a vast throne hall still furnished with royal accoutrements such as an ornate wooden throne and banners depicting mountains, dragons, and other symbols of longevity and power. The palace's eastern counterpart, **Changdeokgung**, is arguably even better preserved and was named a World Heritage site for its quintessential expression of traditional Korean architecture. Its sculpted gardens, graced with ponds and pagodas, infuse a welcome dose of tranquillity in an often frenetic urban core.

Between these two historic structures lies the **Bukchon** neighborhood, one of Seoul's few remaining patches of *hanok*, or old-style Korean homes. Built so closely together that their delicately curved, tiled roofs frequently touch, the snug houses edge a web of alleyways that beg to be explored, each turn likely to toss up a quaint teahouse or curio-stocked gallery. "A walk in Bukchon is really a must," says Fouser. "Most of the houses have been rebuilt or heavily renovated in recent years, but all in keeping with the traditional cityscape."

Seoul's landscape is defined by the mountains cradling the city and the waterways running through it. The rebuilt **Seoul Fortress**, a stone wall that once traversed the ridges overlooking the city center, has proved a boon for trekkers, who now ramble its length, soaking in forested vistas. The segment of the wall from Buam-dong to Samcheong-dong is particularly picturesque, skirting bucolic old neighborhoods and parks. The less athletically inclined can ride a cable car up Mount Nam to the needlelike **N Seoul Tower**, where on a clear day they just might be able to see all the way to South Korea's reclusive northern neighbor.

Seoul's previously neglected rivers have also received a new lease on life. The **Cheonggyecheon** once again courses above ground after a 2005 restoration project that saw it unearthed from the concrete and fitted with walkways, fountains, and light displays. Farther south, the mighty **Han River** is now lined with parks and bike paths and adorned with some eye-catching architecture, including the world's largest artificial floating island—three linked structures of glass and steel that spring from the river like futuristic lily pads.

The **National Museum of Korea** houses an unrivaled collection of art, artifacts, and sculpture including epic landscape paintings and ornate Buddhist pagodas, some from China. For a more contemporary



The upscale Apgujeong district hosts glowing department stores and indie boutiques.

focus, head to the **Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art**, which juxtaposes Buddhist iconography and the work of postmodern bad boys like Damien Hirst. The mammoth **War Memorial** displays a remarkable collection of vintage fighting vehicles (a 1950s-era antisubmarine aircraft, helicopters).

WHERE TO SHOP The older districts north of the Han are still dominated by traditional markets, some of which have operated for centuries. They span multiple city blocks and cater to teeming crowds with dazzling arrays of housewares, fresh produce, and cooked snacks—in other words, a formula for sensory overload and fertile ground for bargain-hunters. **Namdaemun** is the most accessible for visitors, its stalls bursting with Korean specialties such as ginseng and lacquerware. The fashion-conscious rely on nearby **Dongdaemun**, packed with the work of young designers as well as bulk quantities of factory-produced clothing, shoes, and bags. **Insadong** remains the city's go-to zone for classic art, crafts, and souvenirs; calligraphy and ceramics tend to be good buys.

South of the Han River in the affluent Apgujeong district, Garosu-gil, a laid-back enclave with funky boutiques and stores that spotlight up-and-coming talent, has fast blossomed into one of the city's most vibrant blocks. Highlights include **People of Tastes**, an emporium of locally designed clothing and accessories that appeal to a young demographic, and **MMMG**, which

specializes in whimsical stationery and tastefully designed everyday items like mugs and key chains.

WHERE TO EAT While foreign cuisine remains popular, more restaurants are beginning to traffic in culinary nostalgia. Down-home barbecue joint **Hongik Sutbul Galbi** cooks fresh cuts of beef and pork over steel drums and accompanies them with pungent stews and fiery pickled vegetables. The Korean rural idyll has found urbane new digs in places like **Moon Jar**, where humble standards such as steamed pork and mung-bean pancakes are paired with artisanal rice wines. Buddhist temple cuisine, which draws on thousands of years of tradition, delights modern-day diners at elegant **Baru**, which serves vegetarian meals that adhere to ancient principles but sacrifice nothing in terms of flavor or variety.

Lest one accuse Seoul restaurateurs of being mired in the past, a new crop of chefs is boldly reinterpreting Korean cuisine. Trailblazer **Jung Sik Dang** in the Apgujeong area still leads the way with its slick, minimalist atmosphere and constantly overhauled menu that sees native delicacies like sea squirt, kimchi (pickled cabbage), and rice cakes employed in inventive ways. In the gentrifying Itaewon neighborhood, **Vatos** has successfully re-created the Korean taco truck phenomenon in a lively, chic environment of dark wood and exposed brick, along with an airy rooftop terrace that fills with revelers on warm nights. ■

Czech Inn Time

BOUTIQUE HOTELS EMBRACE PRAGUE'S STORIED PAST

by JULIE O'SHEA

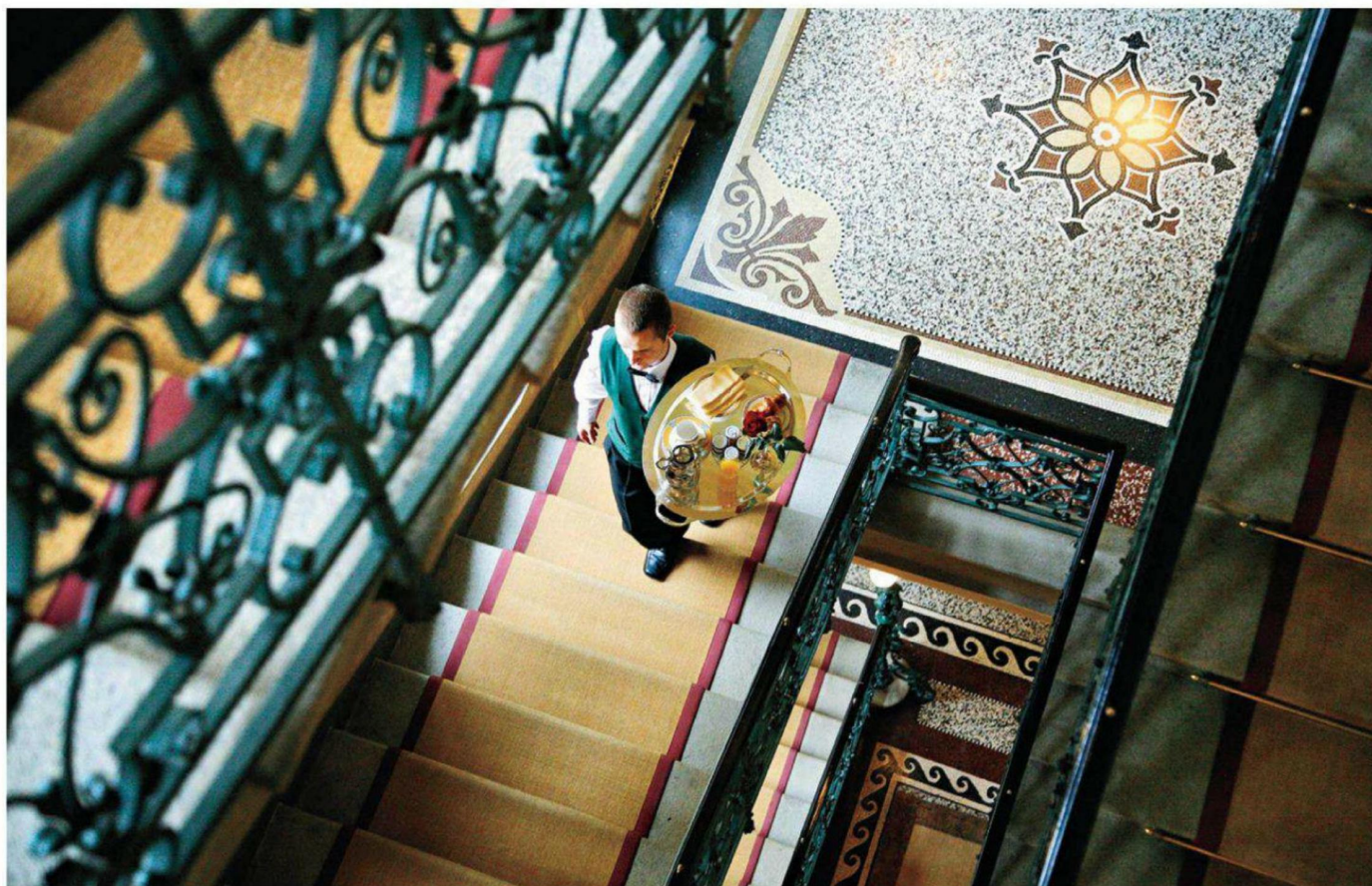
ONE OF THE few Central European capitals to survive the bombs of World War II, Prague stepped into the 21st century looking, more or less, as if it were stuck in the Middle Ages. "Tourism thrives in Prague because of its history. Her old towers, bridges, and churches tell a story," says Karin Líšková, manager of Hotel U Zeleného Hroznu. "Visitors want to experience Prague as it was before, in the old times." Following the collapse of communism in 1989, dozens of boutique hotels took advantage of this widely held sentiment, moving into the Czech city's ornate Renaissance houses that dot the medieval **Staré Město** (Old Town) and the winding streets of the **Malá Strana** (Little Quarter).

Most hotels are in protected heritage buildings, ensuring that their treasures remain intact for generations to come.

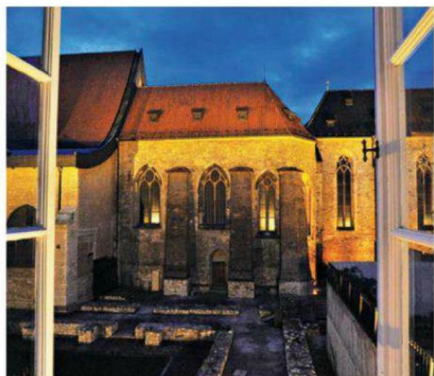
CZECH MATES Tucked down a quiet side street in the city's tony Little Quarter, **Hotel U Zeleného Hroznu** (meaning "at the green grape") makes you feel as if you stumbled upon an insider's secret. At the foot of Prague Castle's main entrance, this peach-colored, 17th-century Renaissance house blends right in. The storybook neighborhood setting of tile-roofed coffeehouses, grand palaces, and cellar cabarets has been attracting luminaries from Mozart to Einstein for centuries. Each of the eight guest rooms is dedicated to a prominent historical figure. Thumb through Franz Kafka

stories from an antique writing desk in a room honoring the author. Listen to old recordings in the Ema Destinová suite, styled with the Czech opera star's own gilded 1920s bedroom and salon furniture, or relax in the sitting room in the spacious ground-floor suite named for composer Antonín Dvořák. French doors open onto an intimate summer courtyard, where breakfast is served daily. From \$111.

MEDIEVAL MANSE Hidden in the shadow of the great Týn Church in a narrow alleyway off Old Town Square lies **Hotel Černý Slon** ("black elephant"), a modest abode dating to the 14th century. The wood-beamed attic guest rooms, among the best spots in the hotel, feature floor-to-ceiling windows



A waiter delivers breakfast at Le Palais Hotel, a belle époque beauty outside the city center in the Vinohrady district.



Hotel Casa Marcello offers guest rooms with views of St. Agnes Convent.

that look out onto the Ungelt, a cobblestone courtyard filled with shops, restaurants, and pubs. One of the city's oldest houses, the building itself has been included in the UNESCO World Heritage-designated Old Town. While much of its interior has been upgraded over the past decade (the baroque-style ceilings in some rooms, for instance, are fancy imitations), the hotel still maintains its charm with delightful details from the past, including a faded wall mural in the downstairs lobby and a brick wine cellar. From \$105.

PALACE ATELIER Outside the city center in the trendy Vinohrady district, **Le Palais Hotel** sits along a tree-lined street, surrounded by stylish cafés and a theater. Built as a private residence in the late 19th century, the 72-room estate is covered with dozens of elaborate frescoes by Luděk Marold, a renowned realist painter who lived on the top floor for in 1887. The Marold suite has a stunning faux-bois ceiling with delicately painted flowers, while the fresco in the Belle Époque suite features angels. Both suites offer wood-burning fireplaces and furnished living rooms. Downstairs, guests can enjoy a nightcap or homemade chocolate pralines in the elegant wood-paneled library. From \$211.

REVERENT ROOMS Combining two 13th-century Gothic houses and their gardens, **Hotel Casa Marcello** was once the dormitory for the nuns of St. Agnes Convent, the site of numerous purported miracles during the Middle Ages. Situated on the edge of Prague's Old Town, this four-star retreat offers 32 standard rooms and suites decorated with eclectic artwork and connected by a maze of echoing hallways and staircases. But what's special here is Casa Marcello's deep connection with the ancient convent, which can be glimpsed from the windows of several guest rooms. The massive city landmark along the south bank of the Vltava River is now an exhibition space for the National Gallery. From \$123. ■

Deep-Dish Chicago

WHERE TO TRY THE CITY'S SIGNATURE PIZZA

CHICAGO'S DEEP-DISH pizza—a manly pie, thick enough to lose your car keys in—has more to do with the city's hearty meat-and-potatoes past than its stylish, locavore present. But Chicago's love for its deep dish hasn't dimmed, and neither has the local debate over the best version of the behemoth. How to choose from the contenders? ¶ Take a historical approach to your pizza sampling. Start at the original **Pizzeria Uno** on East Ohio Street, opened in 1943 by friends Ike Sewell and Ric Riccardo. Here, the claim goes, is where deep-dish pizza got its start. Though Uno has gone national, changed its name to Uno Chicago Grill, and added new menu items, purists stick to the original Chicago Classic, a buttery bowl-like crust filled with mozzarella, grated Romano, Italian sausage, and chunky tomato sauce. Others, though, suggest that it was Uno chef/manager Rudy Malnati, father of Lou Malnati, who invented the deep-dish pizza. Who knows? In the end only taste matters, and the newest location of **Lou Malnati's**, opened on North State Street in 2011, joins the competition with its own take on the Malnati Chicago Classic, made with sausage, fresh mozzarella, and sauce from vine-ripened tomatoes. "It will convert even the thin-pie lover," says local pastry chef Malika Ameen, who salutes the pizza's flaky, delicate crust. If you can't choose between the originals, consider **Pequod's Pizza** in leafy Lincoln Park, where cheese is added to the crust and becomes caramelized during baking. In the tradition-bound world of deep dish, even an innovation that small rates as a minor revolution. —RAPHAEL KADUSHIN



At Pizzeria Uno, patrons dine on deep-dish pizza, which takes 45 minutes to bake.



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Get a full menu of Montreal's wealth of taste experiences, from everyday nosh spots to worth-the-splurge restaurants, late-night hangouts to the places where local foodies love to shop. A *National Geographic Traveler* writer-photographer team just back from Montreal shares the story about a place where food is about more than just eating—it's about reaching into the heart and soul of the city.

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à la
Montréal



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egypt



Visitors gather at the stone Glacier Point Amphitheater to view the alpenglow that illuminates Half Dome at sunset.

Peak Performance

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK IS THE ULTIMATE OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

by MARGARET LOFTUS

THIS 1,200-SQUARE-MILE swath of soaring granite cliffs, towering waterfalls, and ancient sequoia groves has awed millions of visitors for over a century. “I can’t think of a better classroom,” says Beth Pratt, director of California programs for the National Wildlife Federation. “It’s my favorite place on Earth.”

TRAILBLAZE You can’t beat the exertion-to-reward ratio on the flat one-mile, round-trip from the trailhead to the base of **Yosemite Falls**, the highest waterfall in North America. “The Lower Yosemite Fall trail is perfect for strollers and 100 percent wheelchair accessible too,” says park ranger Scott Gediman, who lives in the park with his family. For teenagers itching for a challenge, the seven-mile Mist Trail features hundreds of steps carved out of the cliffside,

but the real thrill is getting drenched in spring and early summer from Vernal Fall. “I call it the full immersion trail,” says Gediman, who recommends timing your hike to arrive at the waterfall in late morning (10:30 to noon) to view incredible rainbows. Take the **John Muir Trail** for a loop hike and a spectacular view of Nevada Falls, Liberty Cap, and the back side of Half Dome. “The trail, waterfall, and granite epitomize Yosemite in so many ways,” notes Gediman.

ROCK AND ROLL Grab your binoculars and stake a claim in **El Capitan Meadow** for a picnic and front-row seat for the rock-climbing show on the monolith. (At night, keep your eyes peeled for the headlamps of climbers as they bivouac on El Cap.) “On the right flank of El Capitan many people see a dark shape that looks like part of a map of North America. Look for a ponderosa

pine growing on a ledge not far from where the Yucatán might be,” says Pete Devine, resident naturalist at the Yosemite Conservancy. The action on El Capitan happens from mid-September through late October. Kids curious for more can talk to legendary climber Ron Kauk at the **Yosemite Theater** on most Friday nights, after viewing a film about his life. Inspired? All levels of climbing lessons are offered daily.

STARGAZE Head to **Glacier Point**, a granite outcropping that affords a sweeping view of the valley, in time to catch the sunset. Find a spot at the amphitheater and watch for the alpenglow “when the setting sun lights up the rocks and peaks—especially the snowy peaks to the east,” suggests Devine. Nightfall reveals a clear sky crammed with stars. “Look for the Summer Triangle, which is visible in evenings through the summer.” ■

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Photography by Silk Studio—from top to bottom:

Milstein Hall of Ocean Life, American Museum of Natural History.

(left to right) Chris Noth; Ana Paula Tavares, Executive Vice President, Rainforest Alliance; and Tensie Whelan, President, Rainforest Alliance.

(left to right, standing) Alanna Stang, VP and Editor-in-Chief of Martha Stewart's *Whole Living*; Andy Adcock, Trading Director for Foods, Marks and Spencer Group plc, Sustainable Standard-Setter; Michael O'Keefe, Restaurateur; and Enrique Lendo, Head of the International Affairs Unit, SEMARNAT. (Left to right, seated) Mike Barry, Head of Sustainable Business, Marks and Spencer Group plc, Sustainable Standard-Setter; Martha Stewart, Founder, Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia; Tensie Whelan, President, Rainforest Alliance; and Juan Rafael Elvira Quesada, Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources of Mexico, SEMARNAT.

(left to right) Ana Paula Tavares, Executive Vice President, Rainforest Alliance; Chris Noth; Martha Stewart, Founder, Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia; and Tensie Whelan, President, Rainforest Alliance.

Daniel R. Katz, Founder and Board Chair, Rainforest Alliance.

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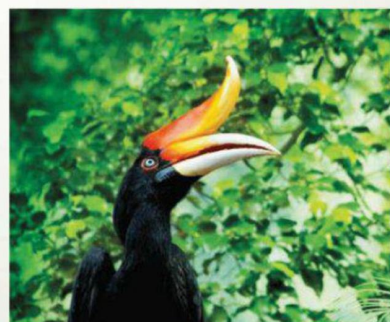
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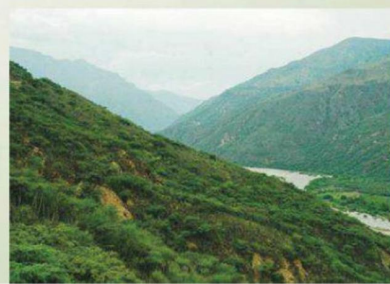


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Call *of the* Wild

On this northern
Minnesota drive,
knockout foliage and
Superior views play
tug-of-war

By BERIT THORKELSON

*A hiker pauses along the
craggy North Shore of
Lake Superior.*

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Naniboujou Lodge.

THE ROAR OF AMERICA'S JAZZ AGE echoed in the Minnesota wilderness. At a time when anything seemed possible, why not an exclusive club for the nation's elite, up where the rugged North Woods and mammoth Lake Superior collide? A group of Minnesota businessmen put plans in place for such a resort, which they named Naniboujou for the Cree Indian god of the woods. Some 600 potential members, including heavyweight boxing champ Jack Dempsey and slugger Babe Ruth, signed on, seduced by visions of an opulent lodge, bathhouse, golf course, and tennis courts on 3,000 acres blessed with "birches like Greek columns and cedars like Gothic pillars." The Great Depression quashed this outdoorsman's dream, and only the lodge was built. Still, 85 years after its conception, the inn survives, its

riches unchanged from the doomed club's prospectus: "the rustle of the pines, the brawling and babbling of the stream, the muffled murmur of the breakers on the beach." Extreme nature dominates northeastern Minnesota, setting the scene for a drive combining coast and forest, small-town character and deep-woods seclusion.

Road trips up the Minnesota shore of Lake Superior begin in Duluth, an industrial harbor town at the southern end of a wooded triangle called the Arrowhead and

two-lane Highway 61. Also called **North Shore Scenic Drive**, the paved boundary between woods and waters delivers views of the ancient volcanic basalt cliffs that plunge into Lake Superior, so vast it merges with the sky on the horizon. At the turn of the 20th century, outbound ships loaded with northern Minnesota's prized iron ore ranked Duluth among the U.S.'s busiest ports.

Life here is still trained on the water. "One of the many pleasures of living in



EXPLORE

From berry picking to surfing, a wide range of activities makes the most of northeastern Minnesota's prolific natural wonders (see map on opposite page). Venture out on your own or hire a guide to maneuver the rugged, roadless **Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness** (above), part of a path sometimes called the "Voyageurs Highway" in reference to the French-Canadian fur traders who plied these waters. From many of the 21 lodges along the **Gunflint Trail**, outfitters lead backcountry trips, from day jaunts to overnight packages including permits, tent, and freeze-dried meals. One of many charter fishing companies on Lake Superior, Grand Marais-based **Secret Lures** has an inside track on snagging salmon and trout, which rise from the chilly depths to the warm surface waters of late summer. Meanwhile, trekkers with their sights set on the 286-mile **Superior Hiking Trail**, which runs the ridgeline above the lake, can hike lodge to lodge or day-trip out and hop the weekend **Superior Shuttle** back. —B.T.



Walleye fish and fries at Chez Jude.

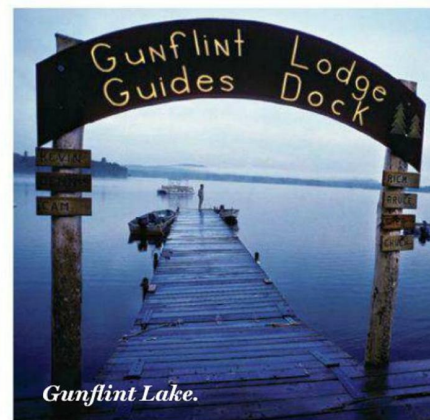


EAT

In a yellow-and-white cottage on Highway 61, **Chez Jude Restaurant and Wine Café** has emerged a star player in Grand Marais's regional/organic/seasonal scene. Chef and co-owner Judi Barsness boasts impressive kitchen cred, from growing up in her mother's French restaurant to training at the Culinary Institute of America and Alice Waters's famed Chez Panisse. Local art hangs in the dining rooms, but a seat on the front deck—the harbor views paired with wood-fired, cedar-planked Superior trout salad Nicoise—always wins.

SLEEP

Amid dense forest along a remote stretch of the Gunflint Trail is the **Gunflint Lodge**, established in 1925 and run by the Kerfoot family almost as long. Cabins come stocked with wood for the fireplace and seed for Canadian jays and red-breasted nuthatches, and the lodge draws folks staying elsewhere for its restaurant overlooking Gunflint Lake. Guests horseback ride, take canoe trips into the Boundary Waters, fly between white pines on zip-line tours led by naturalists, and perfect their moose call (during rutting season in October).



Distance: 111 MILES FROM DULUTH TO GRAND MARAIS **When to go:** AUGUST THROUGH OCTOBER **Tip:** IN FALL, LUTSEN RESORT REBRANDS ITS SKI LIFT A "MOUNTAIN TRAM" TO HAUL FOLIAGE JUNKIES OVER THE TREETOPS TO MOOSE MOUNTAIN. **Plan Your Trip:** VISIT WWW.SUPERIORBYWAYS.COM.

Duluth is that you have to look at the lake a lot,” writes author and resident Barton Sutter in his book *Cold Comfort: Life at the Top of the Map*. “You might only mean to get some groceries, but on your way you see something so grand, so terrible and beautiful, that you absorb your daily requirement of humility just by driving down the street.”

Canal Park, a onetime warehouse district, is now filled with lakeside restaurants, shops, hotels, and historical attractions. On board the S.S. *William A. Irvin*, a 610-foot retired ore and coal ship, tour-goers explore everything from the engine room’s brass controls to the sophisticated wood-trimmed visitors quarters. Working ships still dock here, too (about a thousand vessels annually, more than any other Great Lakes port), lending authenticity with their massive, slow-moving presence as they request passage under the 1905 Aerial Lift Bridge, on occasion still letting out deep, vibrating honks—*long-short-long-short*. Interaction between boats and bridge complements the **Lake Superior Maritime Visitors Center** near the bridge’s foot.

About 30 miles up the road, on the east edge of Two Harbors, a faux-log cabin beckons from the side of the road, as it has for the past four decades. One of a handful of smoked fish purveyors along the shore, **Lou’s Fish House** expertly prepares Lake Superior trout—brined in teriyaki, cured in brown sugar, or worked into a spread. Then it’s on to **Gooseberry Falls State Park**, the first of eight state parks that line the 150-mile-long stretch between Duluth and Canada. More than half a million annual visitors stop to absorb the thunderous, misting cascades along Gooseberry’s namesake river, one of many that tumble out of the forest and into Lake Superior.

A few more minutes on the road brings drivers to **Split Rock Lighthouse State Park**, 2,200 acres edged with steep shoreline trails. Among them stands the black-capped **Split Rock Lighthouse**, a beautiful beacon born of tragedy. In 1910, Congress commissioned the lighthouse atop a 13-story hunk of gray cliff after one of the notorious November gales damaged 29 ships, two of which crashed onto the rocky shore. Navigational tools rendered Split Rock obsolete decades ago, but visitors poke around the keepers’ quarters and climb the lighthouse tower, both outfitted as if operating during their 1920s glory days.

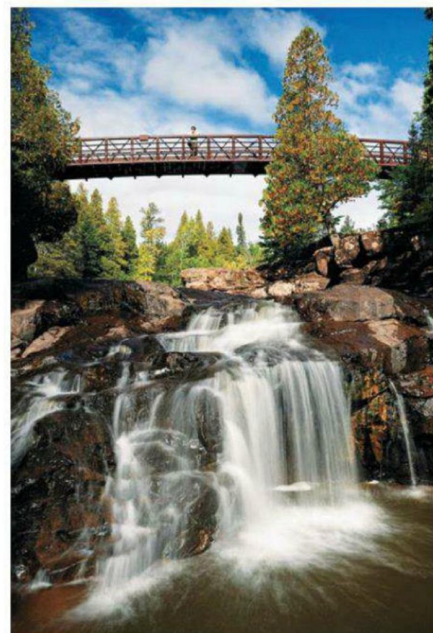
About 40 miles shy of Canada is Grand Marais, which was once an 1800s trading post and fishing village. Current residents of the one-stoplight town of 1,400 tend to be creative types and outdoor enthusiasts, some who lead dog mushing and canoeing trips. “Living at the end of the road helps you take every day for what it’s worth.

Nature’s at your doorstep,” says Kelly Dupre, who works as an artist, author, and volunteer coordinator at **North House Folk School**, which gives classes on northern skills and crafts, from wild rice harvesting to sweetgrass basketmaking.

During fall in Grand Marais’s three-block downtown, jewel-toned paintings of local landscapes fill galleries, pub microbrews turn dark, and seasonal wild rice and mushrooms take over restaurant menus. Painters, writers, and tourists follow a half-mile ancient lava flow to **Artists’ Point** to visit the squat white lighthouse or find a moment of peace within the jumble of rock.

Grand Marais is the lakeside end point for the **Gunflint Trail National Scenic Byway**,

A footbridge offers an overhead view of a cascade at Gooseberry Falls (right). Wisconsin Street is the social artery of Grand Marais (below).



which cuts a 57-mile corridor through the three-million-acre **Superior National Forest**. This remote region grabbed national headlines last August when high winds shifted a small, naturally occurring fire into a voracious blaze, producing smoke that traveled as far away as Russia. The largest the forest had weathered in more than a century, the fire burned into October and scorched a 100,000-acre scar into the Arrowhead. One year later the episode is just another chapter in the land’s rough-and-tumble tale. “Fires are part of life up here,” says Sue Kerfoot, who has lived in the area since the 1960s and runs **Gunflint Lodge** with her husband.

The Arrowhead’s Canadian edge is laced with the daisy-chained lakes and lanky pines of the **Boundary Waters Canoe**

Area Wilderness, over a million motor-free acres that look as they did when American Indians and French fur traders paddled them in the 18th and 19th centuries. A footpath trampled by native Ojibwe thousands of years ago, today the Gunflint Trail passes moose-crossing signs, sapphire lakes, a sprinkling of resorts and lodges, and hiking trails that offer close encounters with wildlife, from foxes and loons to the occasional black bear. The attractions here are the natural ones that lured VIPs to Naniboujou in the late ’20s: the “breath of balsam, the scent of pine ... Deer will pose at the edge of the woods to stare at you.”

St. Paul-based BERIT THORKELSON is the author of Only in Minnesota.



The 15th-century Gothic Hôtel de Ville towers over the majestic Grand Place, the historical heart of Brussels.

Beyond Mussels

OFF-THE-SHIP EXCURSIONS IN BELGIUM'S CAPITAL CITY

By CARLA WALDEMAR

ONLY RIVER BOATS and barges are small enough to fit in the scenic canals of Brussels. Cruise ships dock in Antwerp (about 28 miles away) and Zeebrugge (69 miles), and both cities offer train service and bus transportation to Brussels.

JUST FOR LAUGHS Tintin flowed from the pen of Brussels-born comic book artist Georges Remi, and the character is worshipped all over town. Start at the museum dedicated to the art, the **Belgian Comic Strip Center**, housed in one of the city's art nouveau buildings designed by Victor Horta. Then follow Tintin and other comic strip characters decorating murals on 30 city walls along the **Comic Strip Trail**. (2 hours)

ON THE MENU To celebrate the long-standing reason foodies flock here, Belgium has dedicated 2012 to gastronomy. Wander the public plazas bedecked with oversize sculptures of the city's food icons, from a megacone of *frites* to a giant mussel and

green Brussels sprout. Honoring hoteliers' pledges to serve at least eight local food items on their breakfast buffets, the **Royal Windsor Hotel** showcases a spread of artisanal cheeses next to Liège sausage, organic fruit preserves, and, of course, the puffy, deep-pocketed Belgian waffle. "Old is what's new," says local chef Bert De Coster. "We've come back to traditional foods, with an emphasis on fresh ingredients." A dining tram with a modern, all-white interior trundles past the city's architectural triumphs while patrons enjoy three-course meals created by Michelin-starred chefs. (2 hours)

MUSEUM MUSINGS Brussels is also home to the king of surrealist art, René Magritte. In a new museum dedicated to his works, black walls are inscribed with enigmatic statements such as "Poetry is a pipe." The museum is housed in a neoclassical building that is part of the **Mont des Arts**, conceived in 1882 by King Leopold II, who wanted to create a district to showcase the culture of Belgium. Pop into the **Museum of Ancient**

Art in the 19th-century Royal Museums of Fine Arts for Flemish proto-surrealist Hieronymus Bosch, whose sea demons prepare to gobble angels. (3 hours)

SWEET INDULGENCE The elegant **Place du Grand Sablon** is home to half a dozen chocolate makers. Start with a visit to the venerable **Wittamer**, where you can sip a cup of hot chocolate, thick as pudding, while choosing candy-box jewels. "Our best seller is the heart-shaped *coeur framboise*," says proprietor Myriam Wittamer. "But my personal favorites are the crèmes fraîches." Wander the plaza's cobbled streets like Rue de Rollebeek, filled with shops such as **Dandoy**, the city's oldest cookie baker, engulfed in the aroma of butter. Slip into the graceful **Sablon Church**, with its blaze of stained-glass windows, where, on a Saturday afternoon, you may catch the organist tuning up for Sunday services. Then meander its perimeter, lined every weekend with stalls, to search through antiques and bric-a-brac for that perfect treasure. (2 hours) ■



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2012 *World* *Wonders*

The UNESCO World Heritage List spotlights the planet's most fascinating—and sometimes most threatened—places and customs. As the list turns 40, we celebrate ten lesser known jewels of natural beauty and cultural tradition

By George W. Stone

*The mud-brick
Great Mosque of
Djenné, Mali.*



HORST FRIEDRICH/ANZENBERGER/REDUX

*Lesser flamingos throng
Lake Bogoria in Kenya's
Great Rift Valley.*





Kenya **WINGED MIGRATION**

A migratory stop along the African-Eurasian flyway, the **Kenya**

Lake System in the Great Rift

Valley is a cageless aviary—populated by 13 endemic, threatened bird species. Up to four million lesser flamingos congregate among nesting great white pelicans and roving flocks of spoonbills, grebes, and storks. More than 100 migratory bird species make this their home November through March, which local safari guide Preston Mutinda says is prime bird-watching season. A two-hour drive north of Nairobi, the shallow, alkaline bodies of water combine to cover 122 square miles, with Elmenteita, Bogoria, and Nakuru Lakes arranged, as Mutinda puts it, “like pearls on a string along the Great Rift Valley.” The valley’s floor ripples with hot springs, offering a rich feast of green algae for foraging fowl. Zebras, black rhinos, cheetahs, lions, and giraffes also wander along the shoreline—but even they play supporting roles for the star attraction, the flurry of pink taking flight.

 **On Our iPad Edition:** Watch a video of flamingos in flight at Kenya’s Lake Bogoria. Available for download from the App Store.

Italy and Switzerland

TRACK STAR

To the eager adventurers of the mid-19th century, the Swiss Alps seemed to have it all—majestic peaks, sinuous valleys, exuberant vistas. Just one piece was missing: an efficient way to get there. The launches of the **Rhaetian Railway's Albula** (1904) and **Bernina** (1910) lines reached the previously unattainable, with a series of 196 viaducts and bridges and 55 tunnels opening up a remote domain. The narrow-gauge railway and its trademark red train cars delivered a speedy link to, among other places, Tirano, Italy. As a result, an active winter sporting scene emerged, culminating in the 1928 and 1948 Olympic Games in St. Moritz, Switzerland. Jack Helfenstein, who lives on Lake Zürich, advises Bernina riders to stay on board past the tony Swiss resort. "The next leg is even more spectacular, as it passes glaciers and the snowcapped Bernina Massif." In continuous use since their debut, the click-clacking tracks offer an antidote to the blur of jet-set travel.

A train crosses the Landwasser Viaduct, the Albula Line's signature structure at 213 feet high.



Hungary MASKED AVENGERS

When the calendar turns to pre-Lent carnival season, one thing's a given in the river town of Mohács in southern Hungary: The *busók* are coming. Not that anyone could miss them. Arriving by rowboat on the Danube and cloaked in shaggy pelts, carved wooden masks, ram's horns, and the scraggly chops of a barbarian, some 500 men (and a few women) parade through town, bombarding the air with the jangle of cowbells. Folk singing, craft fairs, and brandy keep spirits high over the course of the rollicking six-day masquerade, called **Busójárás**, which crescendoes into the burning of a coffin that ceremoniously drives away winter. In the centuries since Mohács's Croatian

minority started the carnival, residents have embraced the rowdy ritual as a spectacle with roots in resistance. One legend holds that the tradition began in defiance of the Ottoman occupation of Hungary, when locals retreated to the woods, created their demonic alter egos, and then reappeared to send the Turks packing. Today, the *busók* embody street theater at its most authentic—diabolical grins included. “It’s like traveling through time,” says Hungarian-born Joe Petersburger, a biologist and photographer. “You feel an ancient nomadic power fused with Christianity. The devilish horned masks conceal the revelers, so you never know if you’re looking at a skinny teen or a 200-pound bodyguard.”

A busó in Mohács steps up to scare off winter in costume and with noisemakers.



World Heritage, Defined

The internationally elected World Heritage Committee recognizes 936—and counting—sites for their “universal value to humanity” along with 267 “intangible” customs.

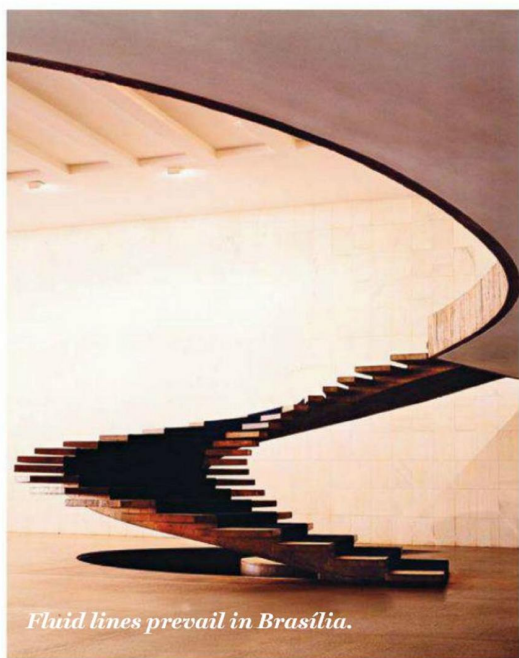
UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) monitors the list. Countries propose their own sites for inscription, which confers no funding but often promises a tourism boost. And

that carries risks. “Too many countries are rushing to exploit their past for present purposes,” says *Traveler* geo-tourism editor Jonathan B. Tourtellot. “Without proper management, ‘loved to death’ syndrome is a real threat.”

Belize **LIFE AQUATIC**

Second in size only to the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, the 237,962-acre **Belize Barrier Reef System** is a watery realm of mangrove cays, coastal lagoons, and coral shelves teeming with seabirds, 500-plus fish species, manatees, and American marine crocodiles. It also features a cobalt abyss called the Great Blue Hole. In 1971, Jacques Cousteau sailed the *Calypso* here on a mission to map its depths and unlock the mysteries of its formation. He determined that a series of geological shifts, starting 150,000 years ago, created a 412-foot-deep cave pierced by massive stalactites and submerged by the rising sea level. In the decades since, an uptick in scuba diving has taken a toll on its delicate coral reef. "Nothing compares with the sensation of swimming with whale sharks along this vibrant reef," says National Geographic Emerging Explorer Alexandra Cousteau, granddaughter of the famed French voyager. "But poorly planned development and rapid human expansion threaten Belize's well-being."

Fringed by coral reef, Belize's Great Blue Hole is a 984-foot-wide oculus into the Caribbean.



Fluid lines prevail in Brasília.

Brazil CITY OF THE FUTURE

In the lobby of Brasília's Itamaraty Palace, a spiraling staircase rises like a helix—one example of the way modernism underpins Brazil's forward-looking capital. A marvel of urban planning built to fulfill an 1891 constitutional pledge, the "Capital Federal" spun into order in 1960 with an emphasis on curved lines and monumental forms, a layout sometimes likened to a bird in flight. Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer's dramatic structures radiate from an axis in which an arc of residences intersects a straight stretch of public buildings. Designed for a population of 500,000, the city of 2.5 million has far outgrown its original vision, yet Brasília's center retains the romance of a time when sleek lines materialized as a language for expressing big ideas. "I always find something new in the ingenious designs of Niemeyer," says Indira Fernandes, who lived in Brasília as a child and says she loves admiring the sunset from the Dom Bosco Sanctuary. Renowned for its Murano glass windows, the concrete-columned landmark was named for an Italian saint who, in the 19th century, dreamed of a New World utopia that was to become Brasília.

ANITA BACK/LAIF/REDUX (STAIRS), JOSE FUSTE RAGA/CORBIS (PEOPLE), JTB PHOTO COMMUNICATIONS, INC./ALAMY (WATER, OPPOSITE PAGE)

Spain SOCIAL CLIMBERS

Northeastern Spain's ritual of *castell* construction, an 18th-century tradition turned contemporary competition, expresses the strength, not to mention structural integrity, of Catalan culture. **Human towers**, which punctuate festivals in Catalonia like daredevil exclamation points, methodically rise to soaring heights within minutes. A young *enxaneta* (rider), often a child, tops the steeple of people and salutes the crowd before the construction is carefully reverse engineered to the ground. "The best enxanetas are light kids who go up and down with no fanfare," says Bernat Olle, who grew up near Valls, where *castell* building originated. "I topped a four-tier tower once in high school with friends. Without skills, for me the feeling was like trying to stand on one of those gym stability balls—except that you can fall and break your neck. Going down isn't any easier."



A human tower festival in Vilafranca del Penedès, Spain.

An aerial photograph of Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's home, nestled in a lush green landscape. The house, a large white building with a central dome and portico, is surrounded by a dense forest of tall trees. A large, open green lawn lies in front of the house. In the background, rolling hills and more trees are visible under a clear sky.

*Early Monticello
visitors roamed
Jefferson's groves of
"pet trees."*

An aerial photograph of the Monticello plantation in Virginia. The image shows a large, terraced vineyard with rows of grapevines planted in a grid pattern on a hillside. A dirt road runs along the left side of the vineyard. In the background, there are dense green forests covering the surrounding hills. The overall scene is lush and green, with a mix of cultivated land and natural forest.

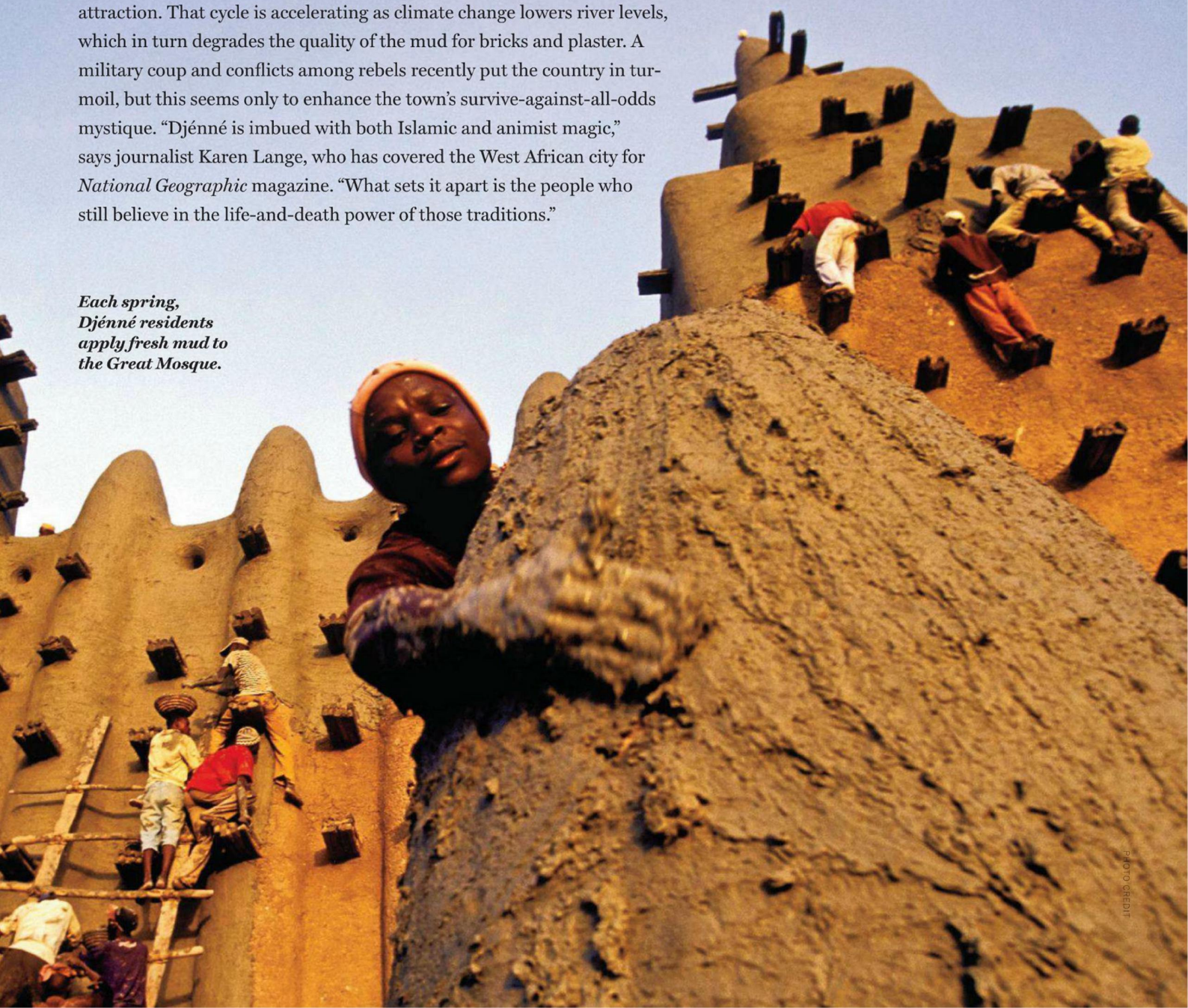
Virginia RENAISSANCE LAND

When Thomas Jefferson traveled, he collected wine and books—and also ideas that would change the course of history. Nowhere is the electricity of his imagination brighter than within the academical village of the **University of Virginia** and at **Monticello**, Jefferson's plantation home in the rolling Piedmont region of Virginia. "Monticello pays homage to Palladio and Old World neoclassical architecture," says Leslie Greene Bowman, president of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, which runs the estate. Though the Founding Father's plans were rooted in those ideals of antiquity, his adaptations signaled the inventive pragmatism of his young country. Completed in 1809, Monticello debuted designs for skylights, round windows, and a domed room. Jefferson had a knack for novelties, from wine dumbwaiters to a rotating clothing rack. "He carved off a mountaintop for Monticello and included terraces and Venetian porches to take advantage of the views," says Bowman. He also pioneered wine cultivation in the fertile land around his estate. Though such experiments bore little fruit in his lifetime, today the Virginia wine industry thrives. The Jefferson laboratory lives on.

Mali **MUD, SWEAT, AND TEARS**

Built on a floodplain along the Bani River, **Djénne's Great Mosque**, the largest mud-brick structure in the world, dominates the Mali town, southwest of Tombouctou (Timbuktu), in fact and folklore. With its smooth, sun-dried mud walls and towers scaffolded with bundles of sticks (called *toron* locally), the mosque appeared like a mirage for trans-Saharan camel caravans during the Middle Ages, when Djénne served as a trading hub. These days the century-old mosque houses a network of arched corridors and prayer rooms constructed on the site and in the style of the circa 13th-century original. Devout locals rally for the annual Fête de Crépissage to slather the edifice with a new layer of mud. A few rainstorms have been known to wash away their work, making the hand-smoothed surface a fleeting attraction. That cycle is accelerating as climate change lowers river levels, which in turn degrades the quality of the mud for bricks and plaster. A military coup and conflicts among rebels recently put the country in turmoil, but this seems only to enhance the town's survive-against-all-odds mystique. "Djénne is imbued with both Islamic and animist magic," says journalist Karen Lange, who has covered the West African city for *National Geographic* magazine. "What sets it apart is the people who still believe in the life-and-death power of those traditions."

*Each spring,
Djénne residents
apply fresh mud to
the Great Mosque.*





Dragon boat race in Hong Kong.

China WATER WORLD

In Chinese culture, the all-important balance of yin and yang wavers on the “double fifth”—the fifth day of the fifth lunar month (falling on June 12 in 2013). That signals a series of rituals intended to shake its bad luck and flush out illness, ranging from hanging herbs at home to the showstopping, chaotic **Dragon Boat Festival**. Fiercely competitive boat races pay tribute to the dragon (the mythological ruler of water) throughout China and with related events in Malaysia, North America, and Japan. Ornate boats crowned with dragon heads, scales, and tails are each powered by a crew of up to 50 paddling frenetically to a pounding drumbeat and, these days, pop tunes. The revelry hits its apogee in Hong Kong, where the Tuen Ng Festival features splashy sprints at Victoria Harbour accompanied by a field day of ritual cleansing, song and dance, and feasts of *zongzi* (rice dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves). “For me, the real thrill is the meaning of the races,” says Hong Kong resident and *Traveler* editor at large Daisann McLane. “They commemorate the poet and statesman Qu Yuan, who threw himself into China’s Miluo River more than 2,000 years ago rather than follow the dictates of a corrupt emperor. Behind the colors and excitement, his story of honor reverberates through the centuries.”

ADAM WONG/REDLINK/CORBIS (BOATS); GEORGE STEINMETZ (SANDSTONE FORMATIONS); YADID LEVY (MUD BUILDING, OPPOSITE PAGE)

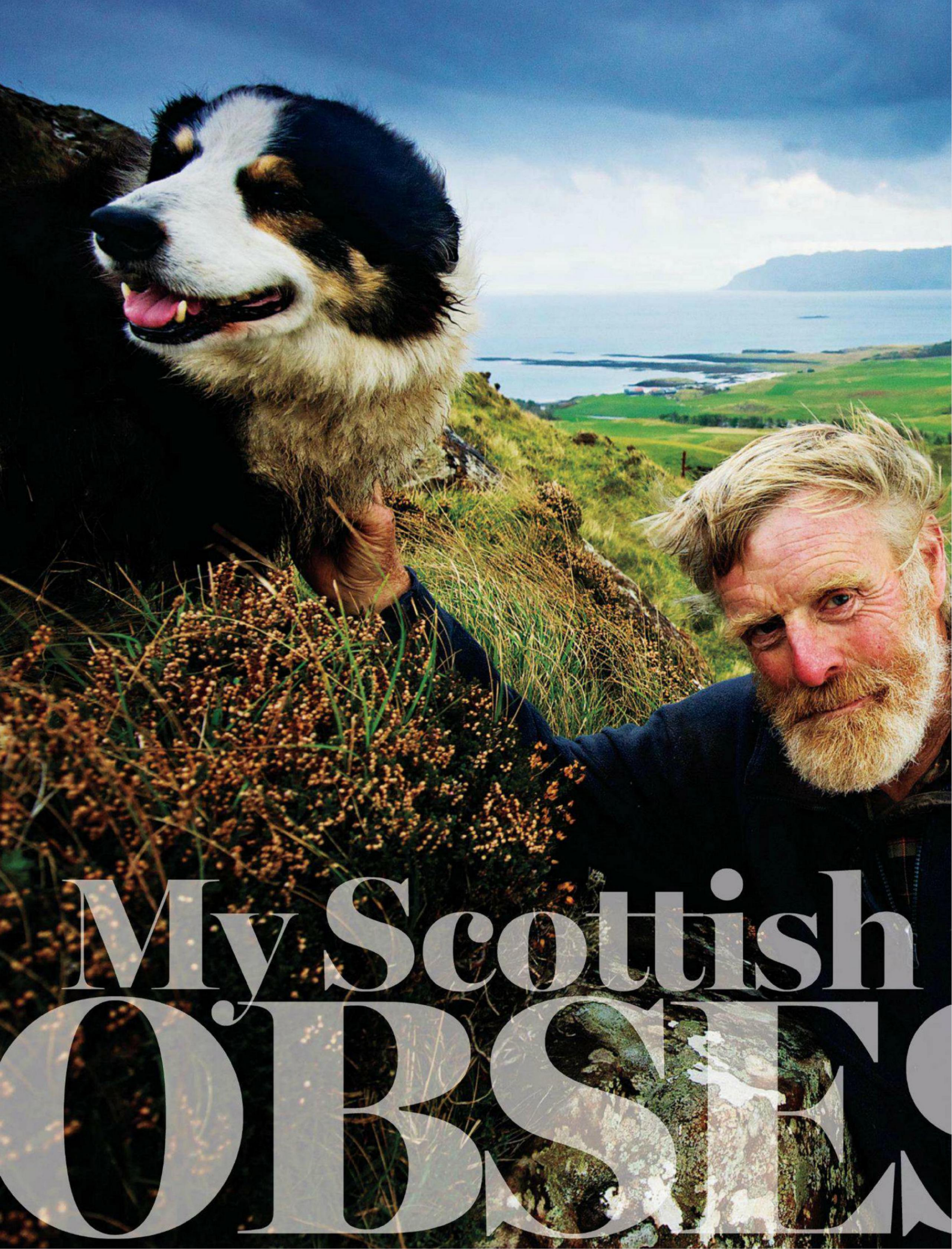
Jordan SCALING THE SANDS

Southern Jordan’s sandstone and granite **Wadi Rum Protected Area** has been called the Valley of the Moon. Another possible nickname—“rock garden of the gods.” T. E. Lawrence (aka Lawrence of Arabia) was so enchanted by Wadi Rum, he wrote of how “the crimson sunset burned on its stupendous cliffs and slanted ladders of hazy fire down the walled avenue” in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, the British Army officer’s autobiography inspired by his time on the Arabian Peninsula during World War I. For the past 12,000 years, successive peoples, from pre-Islamic Arabian tribes and Nabataeans to today’s Bedouins, have tried to chronicle the place’s wonders, with more than 40,000 petroglyphs and inscriptions giving testament to these cultures. By camel or four-wheel drive or by soaring in an ultralight aircraft, visitors traverse the expanse of red sand and craggy rock formations—called *djebel* (Arabic for mountain)—that some archaeologists now fear may be in jeopardy due to inadequate tourism management. No matter their conveyance, travelers are likely to feel the insignificance that Lawrence described: “Our little caravan grew self-conscious, and fell dead quiet, afraid and ashamed to flaunt its smallness in the presence of the stupendous hills.”

Contributing editor **GEORGE W. STONE** has been exploring World Heritage sites for two decades. His favorite is Tsodilo, with its ancient rock art, in Botswana’s Kalahari Desert.



Bedouin tribes inhabit Jordan’s Wadi Rum.



My Scottish OBSESSION

The rugged isles of the Inner Hebrides mesmerize a flatlander from the Midwest

Story and Photographs by
JIM RICHARDSON

*Flint-eyed lord
of his domain,
the Laird of Muck
stands atop his isle,
one of 36 populated
islands that dot the
Inner Hebrides.*

SSION



THE LAIRD OF MUCK hunkers down on top of his Scottish island. And so do I. An Atlantic gale threatens to lift and blow us both out like October leaves, over the sheer cliff at our feet and across the bay 400 feet below, dropping us in the surrounding ocean. Then the laird's sheepdog creeps up, and blond, bearded Lawrence MacEwen pets him with gentle hands. The howling wind, rage as it might, can't make this lord uncomfortable here, atop his island in the Hebrides, where he looks—and is—perfectly at home. ¶ Like other Scottish islands, Muck had a medieval land-ownership system in Gaelic times, when Scottish islanders battled invading Vikings in these very waters. Land ownership took deep root in the Inner Hebrides, rocky isles anchored off the northwest coast of Scotland. Geographically isolated, lashed by the North Atlantic, these brave outposts nurtured an individuality and an independence that have lured

adventurers and romantics for centuries, from the ancient Celts to 19th-century poets, painters, and composers. Even Queen Victoria came, beguiled by the raw, defiant landscapes, alternately sublime and bleak.

It's hardly surprising that a Kansas flatlander like me would find these craggy oceanic domains captivating. According to my plainspoken wife, however, captivation had grown into more than that. "You're obsessed," she'd said when she caught me yet again studying my well-worn map of the islands. "High time you stopped dreaming about the Hebrides and got yourself on one of the ferries." She was right, of course: My keen interest had swelled into a hunger of the soul. I needed to not only visit these places. I needed to make them my own.

SWEEPING HIS EAGLE GAZE across the archipelago known as the Small Isles—vivid in sunlight here, slate gray behind sheets of rain there—MacEwen is giving me a visual tour of his neighborhood. Nodding to the north, he yells, "That island is Eigg. The one to the west of it is the Isle of Rum. It gets twice as much precipitation as we do." I watch heavy clouds dump rain on its hulking mountains. "Just beyond Rum is the island of Soay."

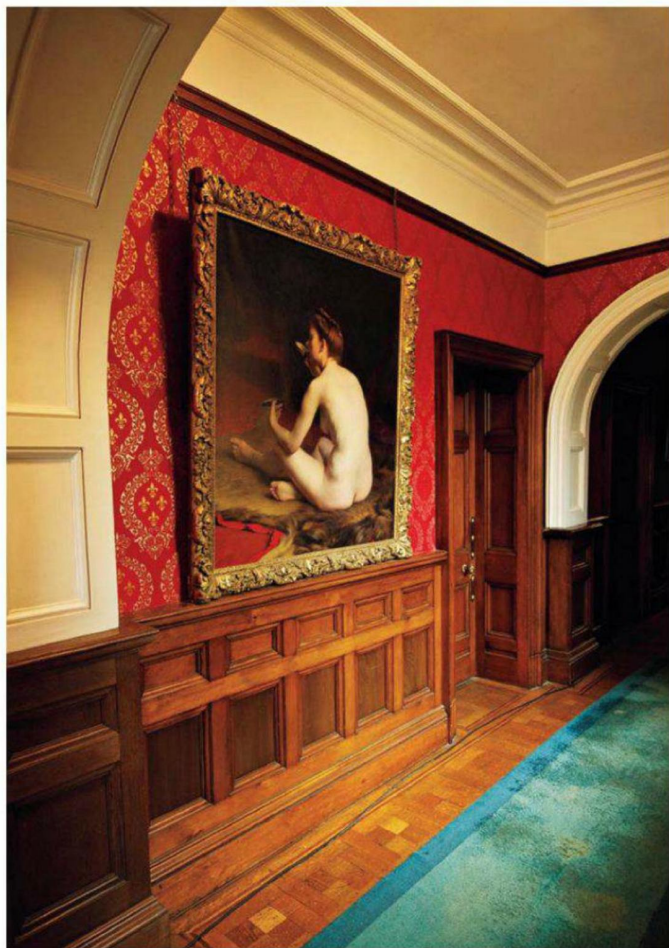
In the howling wind, my voyage is taking shape. Not only can I see my island journey laid out before me—Muck to Eigg to Rum, then down the coast to the whisky isles of the south, Islay and Jura—but MacEwen is sweeping me into his island world. I feel as if I've closed a guidebook and opened a novel as he shares local lore: that Muck had barely skirted oblivion when its population shrank to 13

Wildflowers—and rain boots—are common sights on drizzly Muck (top, left), the smallest of the four main islands that make up the Small Isles cluster. Another Muck sight: Suffolk sheep (left), whose coats contribute wool woven into Scotland's Hebrides tweeds (note cap).



*Rearing up from the
wind-whipped North
Atlantic, a ridge of
pitchstone dominates
the island of Eigg.*





souls; that the crofters of Eigg had run off their lairds (lords); that the Isle of Rum once enjoyed stupendous Victorian wealth. Wee places, these, not much traveled today, inhabited by dreamers and stoics. Retreats from the world. Blank canvases for quixotic quests.

"I have sheep to move," MacEwen abruptly announces when rain drifts toward us. We start down the bluff. As we stride along, he catches me up on island details: Volcanic Muck is two miles long and half as wide; its greylag geese eat vast amounts of grass; and MacEwens are buried in a Bronze Age stone circle here.

Sheepherding interrupts his flow. Tie, the sheepdog, is circling a flock—and not doing it well. "Away to me, Tie. *Away to me*," meaning the dog should circle to the right. He doesn't; he goes straight up the middle of the flock, creating confusion.

"Tie," MacEwen's voice drips disappointment. "That will never do." The dog shrinks with shame.

MUCK IS LARGELY a MacEwen enterprise, has been for a century. Laird Lawrence runs the farm with his wife, Jenny; son Colin, newly married, manages the island cottages; and daughter Mary runs the island hotel, Port Mor, with her husband, Toby (he manages the hunting). Mary and Toby love that their two boys can wander the island on their own and sail dinghies on summer days. "They go out the door and come back only when they're hungry." But island life has its compromises. For one, electricity on Muck remains a sometime thing. My first evening, I wait anxiously for the lights to turn on. The next morning I find Mary setting out breakfast by flashlight. But I get used to it—along with no cell phone service. "There is mobile reception on the hill," Mary tells me. "Most people last a couple of days, then just put the phone in the drawer." So I do.

Everything on Muck seems delightfully improbable. The boat today brings over groceries—and a woodwind trio, which hops off carrying bassoons and clarinets. Its concert in the island's tearoom proves a smash hit, with islanders tapping their wellies in time to Bach and Poulenc.

That night, sitting by a glowing fire as it rains outside, Lawrence MacEwen tells me how he met his Jenny. "Her father saw a croft on the isle of Soay advertised in the *Times*, and bought it sight unseen. He'd never been to Scotland. Jenny was sent to manage the farm." Did Jenny know anything about running a farm? "She had good typing skills."

Buying a house sight unseen isn't that unusual on these islands, I learn. The clarinetist at the concert had done so. Did these people know what they were getting into? Or was that the alluring part?

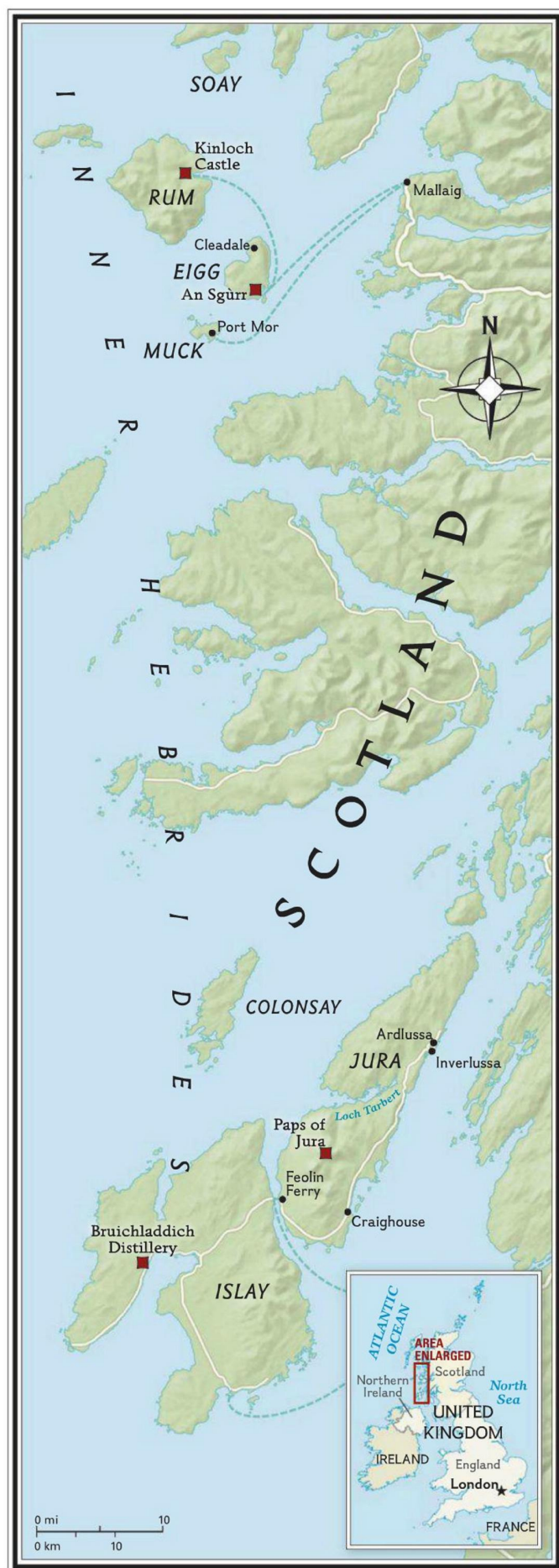
I go to bed with rain and awake to more rain. But I eat well, virtually every last morsel of food coming from the tiny island: lamb, beef, pheasant, seafood, vegetables, fruits—an unexpected variety. Mary sends me down to fisherman Sandy Mathers for fresh lobster. As I watch, he hoists a whoppingly big one out of the cold waters. I carry it back through the village, cross the hotel's grounds (after closing the gate so sheep won't get onto the lawn), and deliver the crustacean to Mary at the kitchen door. By 7 p.m., our lobster dinner is on the table, delicious beyond reckoning.

Also beyond reckoning: my ferry ride the following morning to my next island. Over the preceding two months, many of the scheduled ferries had been canceled because of high seas. If my ferry didn't come, I'd be stuck on Muck for two more days. Which, now, was what I secretly longed for.

The ferry came.

Too bad it wasn't going where I wanted to go. Weather, tides, and ferry schedules are stern masters in the Hebrides. I'd envisioned hopping from one island to the next, but Hebridean travel is its own version of "you can't get there from here." To reach Eigg, just seven miles north, I had to ferry 20 miles northeast to the

Century-old Kinloch Castle (left), built on Rum by the baronet who inherited the island, George Bullough, enjoyed a heyday until World War I. Now a historic site, it features sculptures (top, left) and a revealing portrait of Lady Bullough (top, right).



mainland port of Mallaig, overnight there, then catch a ferry to Eigg the following day. But Eigg proves worth the deviation: As the ferry approaches the 12-square-mile island, its landmark, a black tooth of pitchstone called the An Sgùrr, is raking rain out of gray banks of clouds. Braids of black volcanic sand, washed down from the surrounding cliffs, twist their way across a white shell beach. My photographer's eye cannot get enough of the scene.

Owned by a succession of off-island proprietors, Eigg would gain fame in the 1990s when islanders got fed up with their absentee landlords and bought them out, thereby ending centuries of "recreational colonialism," as one islander put it. This proved a turning point in Scottish land ownership: Common folk formed a trust, raised the money, purchased the island—and became their own lairds.

"It was being owned by a mad German artist that clinched it," Maggie Fyffe tells me in her cottage filled with bookshelves sagging under the weight of tomes about everything. "We said, 'We can do better than this.'" The way Fyffe tells her small-island tale, it becomes world-class drama. When the German artist put Eigg on the market again, in 1997, "everybody here was like, let's go for it." The islanders needed 1.5 million pounds (\$2,463,000) to buy Eigg. More than 10,000 donations flooded in. "We raised half a million from folks around the world. Then a woman who'd followed the story gave a million quid." They bought their island. "Scots love the idea of the little guy winning over the big guy. It was an amazing thing to be part of."



Eigg's new islander owners have been transforming it into a "green island" with an additional 1.5 million pounds they've raised for sustainable-energy technology: water, wind, solar. "It's brilliant, what happened here," says Fyffe. People are moving back; the population is growing.

As evening falls, I poke around Eigg's main settlement, Cleadale Township, a hamlet huddled under cliffs on the island's west side that once was full of crofters and the laughter of their children. I sense a bittersweet Highland melancholy here, left from the 1800s, when the clearances removed the local crofters to make way for something more profitable—sheep.

Yet tonight, Eigg's new community hall is jumping: It's Halloween. Children are arriving from around the island (how can there be so many?), costumed for a contest. I vote for the mummy but praise the pirate, the skeleton, and the gremlin profusely. Life is good. So is the beer.

RUM, ONLY SEVEN MILES to the northwest as the raven flies, is another story. One comes to this larger island (42 square miles) for two things: the hilly green landscape and to size up a stupendous folly. I'll be staying in the folly, Kinloch Castle, docked on its lawn like a red aircraft carrier decorated in Scots baronial style, battlements glued onto towers and facades wherever they would stick.

Disembarked from the ferry, I make my way over to the castle. The derelict structure—so fervently conceived in 1897 by Rum's inheritor, British baronet George Bullough, but now the stuff of *Fawlty Towers* humor—delights with its Edwardian craving for excess, set in stone.

Dusk descends on the village of Port Charlotte (below) on the isle of Islay. Known for its whiskies, including Bruichladdich single malts (above), Islay lies south of Jura, an isle of hunting manors and deer stalkers (opposite), here talking shop at Ardlussa Estate.



Walking the ancient landscape of Jura with Gordon Muir, who is kitted out in plus fours and a deerstalker cap, I feel as if I am in a Highland painting.



Bullough, heir to a fabulous fortune, ran through a measure of it entertaining London society at Kinloch. He renamed the island “Rhum,” allegedly so he wouldn’t be known as the laird of Rum, and lavished his castle with special touches. Tuxedoed guests and their dates, for example, would be called to the grand hall by a mechanical musical contraption known as an orchestrion. The baronet—whose colorful life is recounted in the 2011 book *Eccentric Wealth: The Bulloughs of Rum*, by Scottish author Alastair Scott—later caught the attention of King Edward VII, who knighted him for his help during the Anglo-Boer War, including mandating that Kinloch Castle be put at the disposal of wounded officers.

When World War I came, luxury became unsightly and Bullough spent less and less time on Rum. Today Kinloch is a time capsule administered by the Scottish National Heritage, not so much preserved as ossified in place. Though Bullough and his guests are long gone, I walk the halls hoping for a trace of those vivid times: the click of billiard balls, the whiff of cigars. I find it, finally, hanging outside Lady Bullough’s bedroom: a daring portrait of her, in the nude.

GEORGE BULLOUGH WASN’T the only one to fall under the spell of the Hebrides. I’m headed to Islay, the southernmost of the Inner Hebridean islands and home of another who decamped to a remote place to reimagine himself.

Mainlander Mark Reynier had a thing for whisky. So he bought an Islay distillery.

“First time I saw Bruichladdich, my jaw just dropped,” he says, speaking of the old structure. “It was awful. Trees growing out of the roof.” But Reynier is nothing if not a whisky believer and evangelist. As we walk through today’s modernized complex, he describes his dream of bringing back traditional Scottish distilling. Everything about his distillery is a marvel of antique machinery and unbridled energy. The pot stills steam. Casks in the warehouse waft out the heady, pungent “angel’s share” of whisky vapor.

“The air on this shore of Islay is what the whisky breathes; it absorbs the flavor,” Reynier explains. “I can’t make Bruichladdich anyplace else in the world.” Islay farmers grow organic barley for him just so he can trace the provenance and terroir of each of his bottlings. “The organic barley isn’t some sort of twee thing. It’s because it tastes good. I can tell this barley comes from Mid Coul and the mains of Tullibardine.”

In 2006, he made a whisky that was quadruple distilled to a whopping 90 percent alcohol. “I got the idea from a 17th-century Hebrides explorer who described *usquebaugh-baul*: perilous whisky.” Perilous indeed. Reynier once received an e-mail from the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency asking why one of the distillery’s eight webcams wasn’t working. Seems the defense agency had been using images from Bruichladdich webcams to help train its people in how to differentiate between a chemical-weapons factory and similar-looking civilian machinery. “Apparently our old equipment resembled what they were looking for in Iraq for the production of chemical weapons,” says Reynier. Sensing an opportunity, he turned right around and produced a bottling of WMD—Whisky of Mass Distinction. It sold out almost immediately.

That night I board a ferry for the five-minute ride northeast to Jura, my final island. I can’t wait to meet more folks who’ve let these islands tease out inner gifts.

Such as Andy McCallum and his wife. They’d never lived on a Scottish island—and up and bought a hotel. I reach the Jura Hotel, in the town of Craighouse, after driving the island’s sole road east from the Feolin ferry terminal across moors grazed by Jura’s 6,000 deer (versus 200 people). Camped on a pitch of green by Small Isles Bay, the homey three-story lodge looks more like a big house.

Visitors come to Jura to hunt—seven hunting estates patchwork the island—or to relax. “Things are a wee bit slower here,” McCallum

tells me. “They kind of glide along, like the sea or the wind.” Across the street, at Jura Distillery, manager Willie Cochran echoes the sentiment. In his decades on Jura he has accepted that island life is slow, that whisky takes time. That Jura has special water. “It’s the water that makes the whisky,” he says.

Jura’s hills are sodden with the stuff, I learn when I go tromping across them with Gordon Muir, head stalker at the nearby Tarbert estate (owned by the stepfather-in-law of the current British prime minister, David Cameron). The ground beneath my feet, soaked with rainwater, quivers when I stomp on it. Ahead of us rise the old, rounded mountains known as the Paps of Jura, now wreathed in clouds that slide down, wrapping us in fog. Walking this ancient island landscape alongside bearded Muir—kitted out in plus fours, deerstalker cap, and crook—I feel as if I’m in a Highland painting.

BEYOND THE PAPS, to the north, lies a sea inlet called Loch Tarbert that cleaves Jura nearly in two. I pass it the next day on my way to the island’s upper reaches. Within five miles I find myself at the end of the road—and at Ardlussa, an 18,000-acre estate that encompasses a guest lodge and comes with a young laird, gregarious Andy Fletcher. His family has owned Ardlussa since 1926. Lady Fletcher is Claire, who soon points out the obvious: “Andy was born to this.” She wasn’t.

“I was a radio station manager in Glasgow,” she says, “where I was the boss.”

They share their island story in the kitchen, the oldest part of the 400-year-old-house. Claire met Andy when she came to Jura as a journalist in 1991 to cover a performance by the British band KLF; Andy was hired to drive reporters around the island, Claire lodged at Ardlussa—and they fell in love. The couple lived in London, then Glasgow. But when Andy’s father died, five years ago, Andy moved back to save the estate.

Claire notes the challenges of island life. “It’s 40 minutes to school for the children because the bus stops to deliver groceries, milk, and the paper.” But she’s hooked. “I’d have a hard time living back in the city having had this experience.” Plus, the busy life in London wouldn’t leave her time for such things as her “stitch-and-bitch group. We each bring our sewing or knitting and a bottle of wine.”

Time is plentiful here, to wander, to explore, to discover. Which is how, on a grassy verge 17 miles from the nearest village, I come across a most unlikely sign next to a small folding table. “Tea on the Beach.” I wander over. On the table sit a menu and a walkie-talkie. I speak into the walkie-talkie, and Georgina Kitching answers.

“Would you like some tea and cakes?” Well, yes, I would.

Kitching walks down from her nearby cottage with a tray in hand. Just for me. What possible economic model makes this work? And how did it even come about?

“My husband said there was a house for sale at Inverlussa. I said we better buy it.” Simple as that, her dream comes true. But to support this island life, her husband rides his motorcycle an hour down to Feolin, takes the ferry across to the island of Islay, then rides another 20 minutes to the school where he teaches. Every day.

After settling her family into their new life, Kitching decided she wanted a little business (she laughs), got the walkie-talkies for Christmas (laughs again)—and voilà! Tea on the Beach. It’s a small idea. But last summer, she tells me, a group arrived at her tea table from Ardlussa. Ardlussa, New Zealand. Halfway round the world.

Kitching falls silent, caught by the thought. I’m stunned. Somehow, without really meaning to, she has done a remarkable thing: She has brought people here, to this place at the end of a remote island road on the ancient isle of Jura.

By any civilized reckoning, the folks I’ve had the pleasure of meeting on my Hebridean voyage were mad to think they could buck the modern world and forge an alternative life on these dwarf universes. Yet they did. Like Kitching, they’ve made these islands of rock and wind their own. And, by golly, so have I.

Author and contributing photographer JIM RICHARDSON has been to many of the islands in the Hebrides—but is glad he has more to discover.



On Our iPad Edition: Listen to author and photographer Jim Richardson discuss a selection of pictures that he shot for this story. Our iPad edition is available for download from the App Store.

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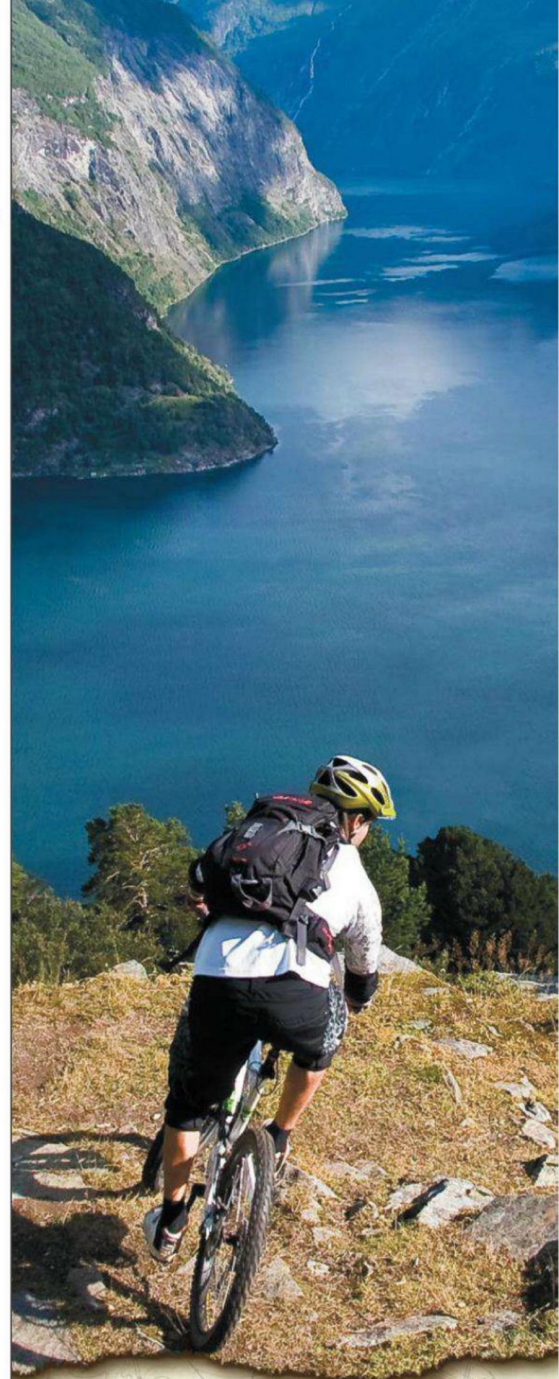
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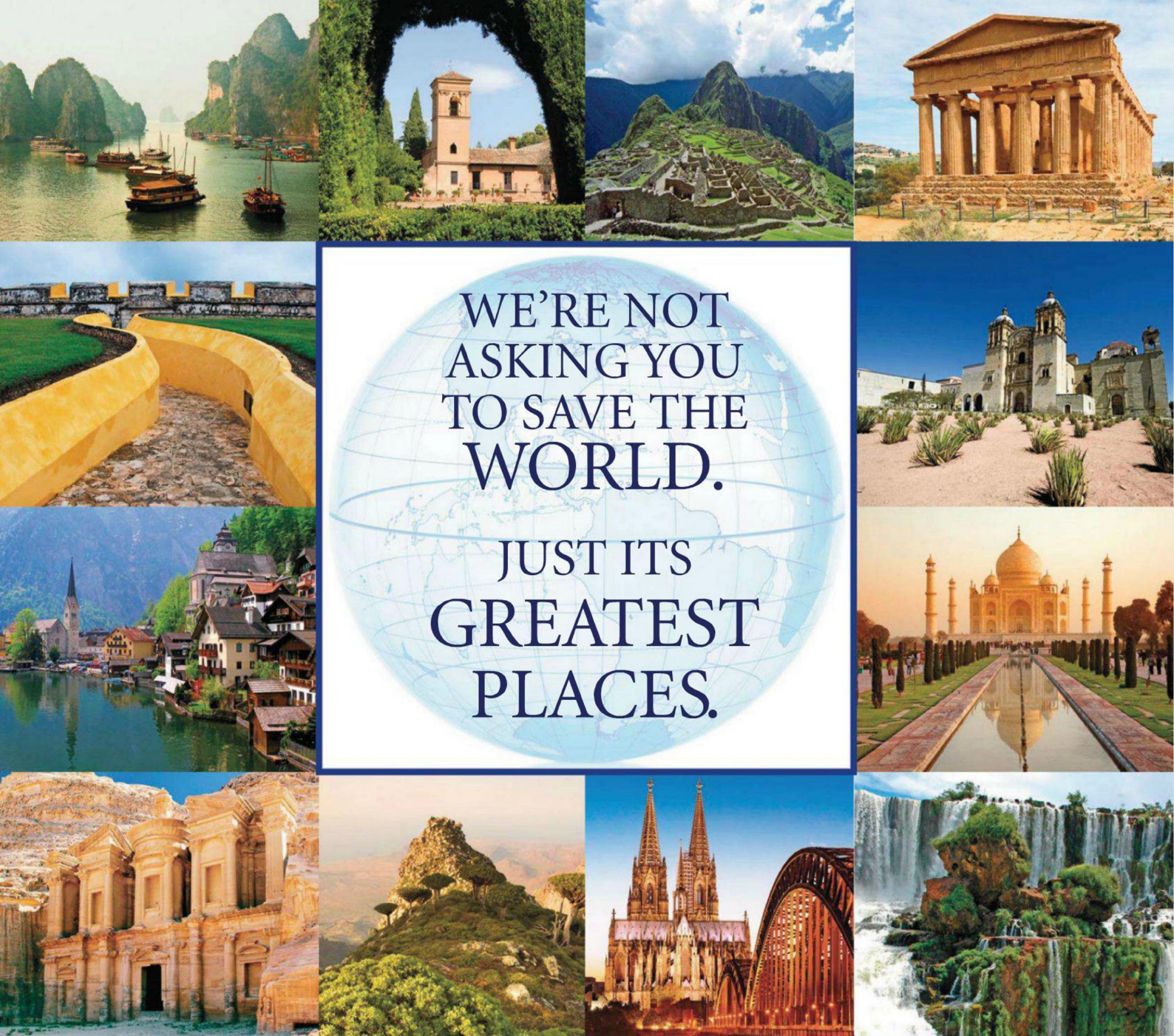


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The Age of MAYA

IT'S THE DAWN OF A NEW DAY
IN THESE FIVE MEXICAN STATES

By Joshua Berman
and Andrew Evans

*A dense forest in Chiapas
encloses Palenque's ruins.*

T he end is near. And so is a new beginning.

December's winter solstice brings a big bang to southeastern Mexico, where locals and visitors will celebrate the completion of the 5,125-year cycle of the Maya Long Count as a moment that heralds not doomsday, but the dawn of a new day and the start of a calendar cycle. Even if it's just another sunny morning in Mexico, travelers should get ready for revelation.

Populated by the descendants of storied civilizations, rich in biodiversity, and safe to explore, these five states offer Maya-influenced destinations full of activities and discoveries for curious travelers. The "Snake Kingdom" of Calakmul winds its way across time in Campeche. In the now silent city of Uxmal, in the state of Yucatán, cave swallows dart by the thousands around ancient archaeological sites. Near Tulum, in Quintana Roo, limestone sinkholes called *cenotes* make for a mystical aquatic experience. Deep in the state of Chiapas, the Lacandón Jungle offers a lush tangle of flora and fauna and a region of cultural wealth. And in a museum in Villahermosa, the capital of Tabasco, the much-studied Tortuguero Monument 6 contains the only known reference to the end of the Long Count.

The ancient Maya believed in beginnings as well as endings. Their calendar marked the days of a culture that would endure. Here are five perfect places to find timeless treasures.

JOSHUA BERMAN is the author of *Moon Maya 2012: A Guide to Celebrations*. ANDREW EVANS wanders the world as *Traveler's Digital Nomad*.



CAMPECHE

Pyramid Schemes

THE STEPS ARE STEEP, the temple sky-high, and the limestone is warm and worn at Calakmul's Structure 2. But climbing these stairs, as sweat drips and legs burn, is the only way to comprehend the spectacular biosphere reserve that surrounds this large archaeological zone. The forest-sheltered site feels a world away from the capital city of Campeche, a coastal colonial jewel with stone fortifications, brick-paved streets, colorfully painted homes, and more than a dozen Catholic churches.

Clambering to the summit of a Maya temple is a great way to gain perspective on the region. Calakmul was a major force from about A.D. 400 to 850, one of several independent city-states vying for power in the region. Its influence, along with the angry-eyed, hooknosed serpent glyph its scribes tagged onto any inscription regarding their empire's exploits, earned it the ominous name Snake Kingdom. "Calakmul may well have been the largest of all Maya cities," says

Edwin Barnhart, director of the Maya Exploration Center at the University of Texas at Austin. "Surveys have found more than 6,000 structures, and that's not nearly all the buildings there." Now the fallen city—rediscovered in 1931—is mostly hidden beneath the forest canopy, with only a fraction of its structures uncovered and more wildlife than tourists.

Scholars of the Maya divide the civilization's history into three periods: Preclassic, dating from the earliest settlements in 1800 B.C. to about A.D. 250; Classic, from about A.D. 250 to 900, when Maya empires dominated the region; and Postclassic, from A.D. 900 to the collapse of Maya civilization and the arrival of the Spanish in 1502.

Calakmul doesn't factor on most travelers' radars. Those who make the effort wander freely, listening to the forest sounds and imagining the armies that may once have assembled here before setting off to do battle. With each turn, the Snake Kingdom seems to stretch silently in every direction.

MUNDO MAYA: Discovered in 1990, *Balamkú's* 65-foot painted stucco frieze is among the Maya world's largest intact reliefs. Its detailed, colored carvings feature jaguars, frogs, alligators, and frightful mythological beasts. At *Edzná's* Templo de Mascarones ("temple of masks"), look for twin friezes of rising and setting sun god masks.

ON THE GROUND

Digital Nomad Andrew Evans trekked across Maya Mexico. These on-the-road dispatches are adapted from his @WheresAndrew tweets.

JUNGLE LOVE

Calakmul is no day-trip—once you're at the entrance, you still have a 90-minute drive through the jungle to the ruins.

STONE CITY

Edzná, discovered in 1907, was inhabited for about 2,000 years—from circa 500 B.C. to A.D. 1500.

LOCAL FLAVOR

Sikil pak, a spicy pumpkin seed-tomato-orange-juice dip, is Campeche's alternative to guacamole.

Rise, shine, and climb for views over the Maya lowlands from the structures of Calakmul.

*Colonial style defines
Hotel Hacienda Mérida,
an estate built in 1840.
Opposite: Hacienda
Sotuta de Peón maintains
the time-honored tradition
of harvesting henequen.*



YUCATÁN

Town & Country

MÉRIDA, THE COLORFUL COLONIAL capital of Yucatán state, radiates with the white heat of the afternoon, when locals duck in and out of an urban network of plazas, cathedrals, and boulevards. Founded in 1542 atop a ruined Maya city, Mérida buzzes with the activity of about 800,000 residents. The city still shines after the sun goes down, when spotlights make the Cathedral of San Ildefonso glow and *trova* singers roam the cafés and wander past S-shaped *tú-y-yo* chairs.

Outside the city, it's a different story. The quiet Yucatán countryside extends south to the low hills, and travelers along the 27-mile-long Puuc Route—either driving on their own or on a tour out of Mérida—skip between villages, archaeological sites, caves, haciendas, and restored plantations. Anthropologically inclined travelers are drawn to Uxmal, a powerful center of Postclassic Maya history. But the less visited ruins in the region—Sayil, Xlapak, Labná, and Kabáh—seduce with their own stone palaces and overgrown pyramids.

A long day of exploration gives way to a languid evening, but where to stay? A few of the best haciendas—large houses within a plantation or estate—were built by Spanish colonizers in the 16th century and turned into luxury resorts and spas in the late 20th. Some of the most memorable were built near the entrances to archaeological sites, such as Hacienda Uxmal, an elegantly weathered ranch house with two stories of rooms surrounding a swimming pool. The enveloping forest produces a cacophony of birdsong at dawn, providing a wake-up call so that guests can be first in line when the gates to the Uxmal archaeological site open and the cave swallows begin their frenzied morning show.

Hacienda Sotuta de Peón is a working plantation that employs some 80 local families in a demonstration of how henequen, the agave fiber that supported the Yucatán economy for decades, was grown, harvested, and turned into rope. This twisted cable of “green gold” created regional wealth, connected cultures, and remains an important link between the Maya past and present.

ON THE GROUND

SIGN OF THE TIMES

The amazing thing about the Chichén Itzá Temple of Kukulcán—named for the plumed serpent deity of Maya mythology—is that it's a giant calendar: 91 steps x 4 sides = 364. A day short of a year, but quite a timetable.



TIPPING THE SCALES

When checking out Chichén Itzá, a tourist kid says to his parents, “It's not *that* big.” Here's my own portable pyramid perspective (above).

GREEN DREAMS

I stayed at Hotel Xcanatún, a hacienda from the sisal boom. It's a garden dream: bamboo, ceiba trees, heliconia, birds-of-paradise, ferns.

ARTFUL STONE

It's incredible to think that the elaborate stone carvings decorating the Nunnery Quadrangle at Uxmal were done by hand a thousand years ago.

TIME LINES

As I explore Chichén Itzá, I compare it with cities of today: churches, markets, government, schools, and stadiums. All here.

CRAZY GODS

The beauty of Chichén Itzá is its artwork. Spot the feathered serpent god Kukulcán at the Platform of Venus. Scary and cool at the same time. —A.E.



MUNDO MAYA: A massive complex of temples, palaces, and altars, *Chichén Itzá* is crowned by the Temple of Kukulcán (“El Castillo”), a 79-foot-high pyramid. Founded around A.D. 500, *Uxmal* is known for ornate friezes featuring feathered serpents and masks of the rain god Chac.

*Divers at Gran Cenote
plumb the depths of what
the Maya considered a
portal to the underworld.
Opposite: A lagoon in the
Sian Ka'an Biosphere
Reserve at sunset.*



QUINTANA ROO

The Deep End

THE WATER IS CLEAR, cool, and deep at Gran Cenote, a sun-dappled pool that's part of the world's longest submerged cave system. Some 7,000 sinkholes or cenotes (the word is derived from the Maya *dzonot* or "well") pock the Yucatán Peninsula's limestone landscape, providing life-sustaining sources of fresh water for settlements and presenting forbidding portals to the underworld, as the ancients interpreted these formations. The Maya believed that cenotes were sacred passages from the land of the living to the realm of the dead. Diving in Gran Cenote, into its eerie immensity, feels like a dip into the aquatic heart of the spirit world.

Quintana Roo consists of the white-sand eastern fringe of the peninsula, from north of Cancún down to Belize, and the heavily forested lowlands west of the coast. The walled city of Tulum, with its temple on the Caribbean, was a safe trading hub through the 15th century. But back from the beach, a mysterious landscape beckons. It's a jungle world where fresh water twists slowly through underground channels, fish

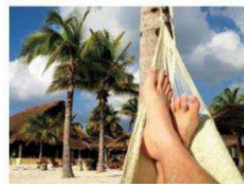
flit in the dark current, and, above the water, birds swoop through a tangle of vegetation. To the Maya, water represented both life and death. Cenotes were more than just providers; they were windows to the underworld of Xibalba ("place of fear") and places of religious significance. Some were ritual sites, and even today, these pools can contain sacred artifacts and skeletal remains from long-ago sacrifices.

Not all cenotes are concealed pools within a submerged cave system. The Lagoon of Chunyaxche reflects brilliantly under the sky in the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, the largest protected area in the Mexican Caribbean. And not all are in Quintana Roo. The neighboring state of Yucatán features a number of stunning sinkholes, including X'Kekén, at Dzitnup, a deep pool within a vast cavern dripping with stalactites (at midday, the stony ceiling is punctured by a shaft of sunlight). Ik Kil is a turquoise cenote ringed by towering stone walls, draped with vines, and crowned by a forest canopy. And Yokdzonot is a snorkeler's delight, alive with little fish that dart about and bordered by hanging tree roots.

ON THE GROUND

COASTAL CUISINE

In Quintana Roo, dinner is spiny lobster tail flambéed in tequila with fresh lime and garlic butter. Steamed veggies and rice arrive in a banana leaf.



SAND AND SUN

Cozumel is the largest island off the Yucatán Peninsula. I'm at a coastal resort on this "island of swallows" (above).

A NEW WORLD

Politically, Tulum took over where Chichén Itzá left off. When the Spaniards arrived, the city was still going strong.

BIKE THE SITE

The ruins of Cobá are spread out for miles, which is why people rent bikes to get around. Alas, the Maya had no bikes.

WHAT A DIVE

I had a fantastic dive in the waters off Cozumel. I saw majestic coral, two sea turtles, a nurse shark, and a million flashy fish.

WALLS THAT SPEAK

Iguanas rustle in the leaves and birds sound off like squeaky toys as I walk along the edge of a white stone wall built hundreds of years ago in Tulum.

RUIN WITH A VIEW

The allure of Tulum is that it's by the sea, making it different from ruins in the heart of the jungle. —A.E.



MUNDO MAYA: Within its 25-square-mile sprawl, **Cobá** ("water stirred by wind") features miles of raised limestone roads (or *sacbeob*) that are perfect for biking. The white-walled city of **Tulum**, on the Caribbean coast, was a port of trade and one of the last Maya-inhabited cities.



*Tradition and modernity
mingle at every turn in
Chiapas. This jade mask
of King Pakal was found
at Palenque. Opposite:
A street festival in San
Cristóbal de Las Casas.*

CHIAPAS

In Living Color

WITH ITS INTOXICATING SCENT of fresh pine needles, the amber tree resin copal was burned as incense at ancient Maya ceremonies, wafting fragrant smoke to feed the gods. A visitor to any village in Chiapas need only sniff out the copal smoke to find the local church and discover its mix of Maya and Christian icons and traditions. Throughout Chiapas, antique realms reveal themselves beneath a patina of modernity.

A few state secrets are revealed in the colonial sprawl of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Start to unlock them at Casa Na Bolom ("house of the jaguar"), a nonprofit hotel, museum, and cultural association dedicated to the preservation of the Chiapas rain forest and protection of the Lacandón Maya people. From here, plan an excursion to the volcanic highlands surrounding the city, where families of Tzeltal and Tzotzil Mayan language speakers descend into the villages on market days, wearing bright, intricate patterns passed down through generations.

In the Technicolor village of Zinacantán, Tzotzil Maya women offer demonstrations of traditional

textile techniques, displaying the techniques that create the region's famous floral tapestries. This cultural immersion takes a culinary turn around lunchtime, with a traditional meal of tortillas, beans, and coffee—and perhaps a belt of *pox*, a sugarcane-based alcoholic brew with a serious kick.

For a deeper view of Chiapas, hop aboard a colorful *lancha*, a wooden skiff that hauls travelers down the Usumacinta River and into the Lacandón Jungle. These narrow boats, often with thatched palm canopies, depart from Frontera Corozal and edge ever deeper into the forest. Tree-shaded sunlight glints off the water, and it's easy to feel tiny while cruising under the towering trees in a jungle thick with bromeliads and exploding with orchids.

For centuries, the Usumacinta River connected the rival cities of Yaxchilán and Piedras Negras. Today, it's the border between Mexico and Guatemala and is still the best way to get to Yaxchilán, a city founded in the fourth century A.D. There, if a Lacandón Maya group has come to perform a ceremony, the seductive aroma of copal incense will drift past the pyramid steps as howler monkeys roar.

ON THE GROUND



HOT TAMALE

Tamales (a name from the Nahuatl language) are an original Mexican food: cornmeal and meat stuffed into corn husks and steamed (above).

UNDER THE VOLCANO

Izapa is one of the largest pre-Hispanic settlements of Chiapas, with origins that go back to 1500 B.C. The majestic ruined city is under the shadow of the Tacaná Volcano.

JUNGLE EMPIRE

Palenque, one of the largest and best preserved Maya sites, is deep in the jungle. I explored about ten New York City blocks of it—and barely scratched the surface.

ROAD VISIONS

From my bus, the road to Comitán is a dusty dream. Slanted sunbeams fall upon indigo mountain silhouettes. A barefoot boy waters his family garden.

TIMELESS PEAK

At many points in southern Chiapas you can see the summit of Volcán Tajumulco, the highest mountain in Guatemala and the peak by which the Maya set their calendar.

TO THE MARKET

It must be mango season. Thousands of these ripe, fragrant yellow fruits are piled high in markets throughout Chiapas. —A.E.



MUNDO MAYA: *Izapa*, central to the development of the sacred Long Count calendar, was among the most important pre-Hispanic settlements of southern Chiapas. The influence of *Palenque*, a powerful Maya sanctuary, extended throughout the basin of the Usumacinta River.

TABASCO

The Sweet Spot



Cacao pods hold big seeds—money for the ancient Maya and the chocolaty secret of Tabascan cuisine.

IT MAY BE THE END of one calendar era, but the people are still hungry. Tabasco has served as a crossroads for cultures and cuisine ever since the Olmec civilization advanced astronomy, calendar keeping, and other scientific activities that paved the way for the Maya reign.

You can have your history and your *almuerzo* (lunch), too, at the Carlos Pellicer Cámara Regional Anthropology Museum in Villahermosa, Tabasco's largest city. Here you can see Tortuguero Monument 6, one of the most famous relics in the Maya world. This cracked stone slab bears what may be the only documented ancient reference to the end of time (or, more likely, the end of a calendar cycle). Nothing stirs an appetite like a brush with an apocalypse.

Los Tulipanes, an eatery next to the anthropology museum complex, buzzes around lunchtime, when locals share plates of *pejelagarto*, "lizard fish," cooked inside fresh empanadas; herb-stuffed tamales; and cheese-topped plantains. The menu reflects *comida tabasqueña*—traditional Tabascan specialties such as

grilled fish and palate-tingling sauces (which inspired Tabasco sauce, invented in Louisiana).

No meal is complete without a cup of posol, a fermented corn-dough concoction that's said to be the state drink. Often served in decorated jicara seeds, posol can be sweet, sour, or spicy. It's best blended with a lick of cacao, that flavorful ingredient.

The Maya dried, fermented, and toasted cacao seeds, using them in a wide variety of dishes. Today, cacao seeds work their way into tortillas, tamales, and other edibles. They remain the essential elements of chocolate, which has been elevated to an art form here. Jump on the cacao trail in Comalcalco, north of Villahermosa, where demonstration farms offer the chance to taste each step of the chocolate-making process, from the tangy, white pulp of fresh cacao fruit to the decadent bite of the finished product.



On Our iPad Edition: Learn about real tacos and cenote swims in videos by Digital Nomad Andrew Evans. Available for download from the App Store.

ON THE GROUND

TIME TRAVELS

Tabasco is Olmec land. These predecessors of the Maya helped create the Long Count calendar, which inspired specious doomsday prophecies.



GET YOUR FIX

Save room for chocolate sold by the road (above). This thick drink of cacao with cinnamon and chili energizes and soothes at the same time.

COUNTRY ROADS

Tabasco is horse-crazy. Out near the Maya ruins of Pomoná, you see more caballeros (cowboys) on horseback than cars.

MAKE TRAILS

Stray from the crowds. At Pomoná you can have silence, nature, and a deeply emotional sense of these forgotten ruins.

PEPPER POWER

Chile relleno is the perfect food: fried dough stuffed with hot peppers and a tennis-ball-size glob of melted cheese.

HAPPY ENDINGS

I tasted my first Mexican churros in Tabasco. They were crispy, hot, and dusted with sugar. Ideal for dunking in chocolate.

Read additional Digital Nomad dispatches on Maya Mexico at digitalnomad.nationalgeographic.com. —A.E.

MUNDO MAYA: The structures of *Comalcalco* are built of fired bricks, not limestone blocks. Some believe that an inscribed brick found here prophesies doomsday; scholars disagree. At less than a square mile, the ruins of *Pomoná* make for a retreat from busier Maya sites.

REMEDIOS VALLS/LOPEZ/AGE FOTOSTOCK (CACAO); ANDREW EVANS/NGS (HOT CHOCOLATE)

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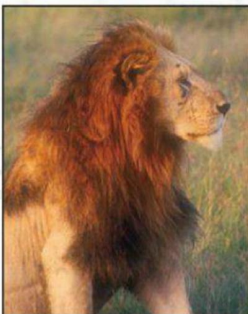
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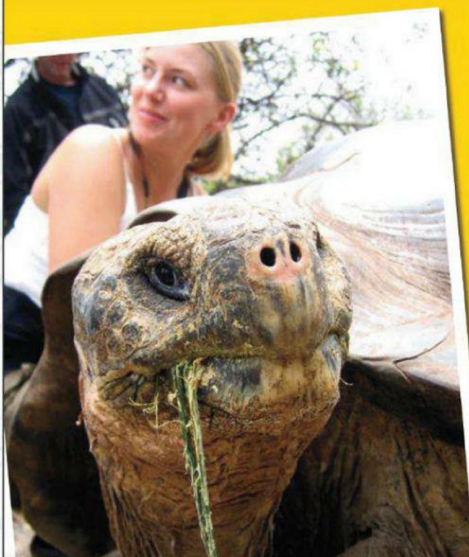
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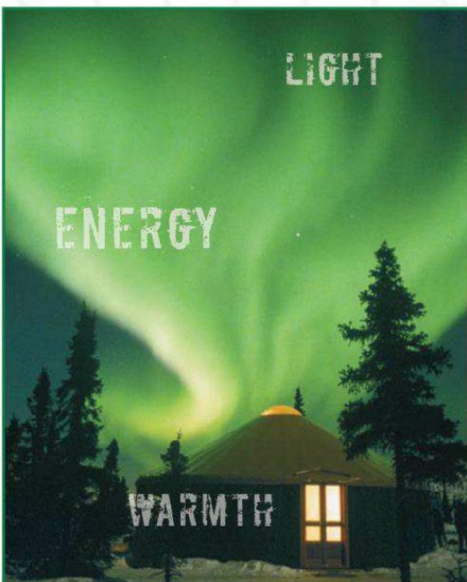


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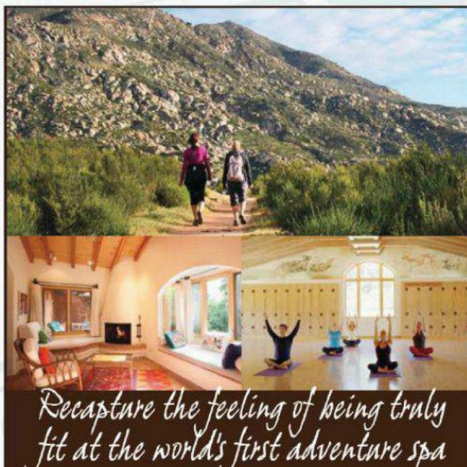


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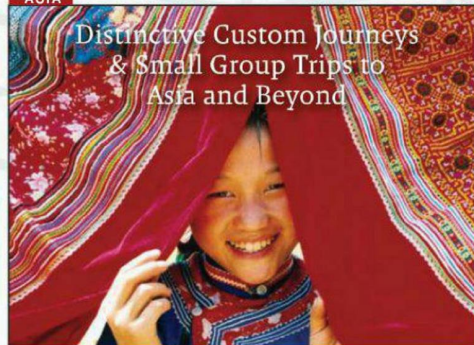
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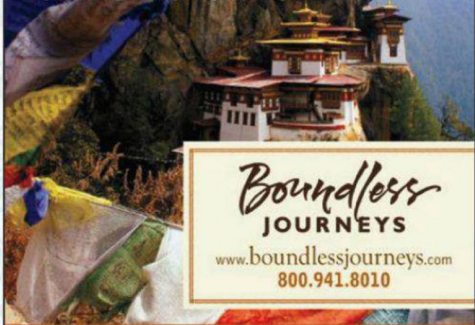


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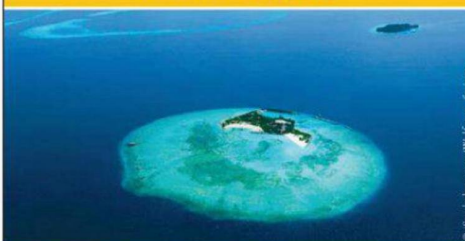
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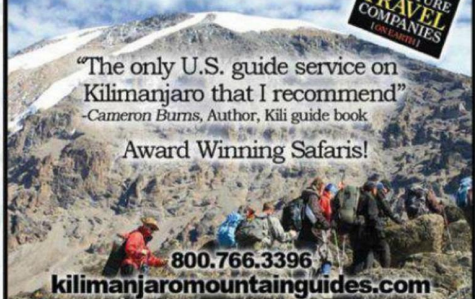
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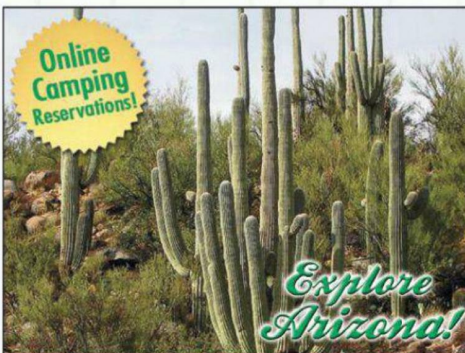
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Empire State Building

IT'S THE BIG APE OF MANHATTAN. The 102-story skyscraper towering above Fifth Avenue is an expression both of New York's triumph and its ingenuity. Built in a record 410 days by a contingent of 3,500 workers, rising at a rate of 4.5 stories per week, the Empire State Building became an immediate hit with everyone but tenants when it opened for business in the Depression year of 1931. The "Empty State Building" remained underrented for years. But who really cared? Immortalized by Hollywood in 1957's *An Affair to Remember*, the art deco gem still wins hearts as a romantic wonder of the world. —ANDREW NELSON

HOW HIGH: 1,454 feet, including the tower. It's equivalent to a stack of 299 New York City cabs.

STAIR MASTER: 1,576 steps to the 86th-floor observatory; 1,860 to the 102nd floor.

RACE TO THE TOP: 9 minutes and 33 seconds to the

observatory—a record set in 2003 by Australian Paul Crake in the annual ascent on foot.

TAKE THE ELEVATOR: It takes less than one minute to ride the elevator from the lobby to the 86th floor.

PRIMATE DATES: Only two blondes accompanied Mr. Kong to the top—Fay Wray in 1933 and Naomi Watts in 2005. In the 1976 *King Kong* remake, Jessica Lange monkeyed around on the World Trade Center.

SKY-HIGH: The building stood as the world's

tallest until 1972, when the World Trade Center's north tower was completed.

MOST USELESS FEATURE: A dirigible docking station that was more publicity stunt than reality. No airships ever nosed up. Unloading passengers on a gangplank would have been impossible.

HOW MANY JUMPED: At least 37 people have leaped from the building.

HOW MANY LIVED: Four parachutists. In April 1986 Alastair Boyd and Michael R. P. McCarthy jumped off the building. McCarthy was arrested immediately. Boyd hailed a cab. In 1998

QUIZZABLE

What colors are lit on the building for Columbus Day?

- a) red, green, and white
- b) red, black, and green
- c) gold

The colors are red, green, and white.
Answer: A.

Thor Alex Kappfjell and an unidentified friend safely floated to the ground.

WILL YOU MARRY ME? The observatory deck is the place to pop the question. Savvy romantics plan proposals on weekend nights when a hired saxophonist strolls the deck from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m. and will play a couple's favorite song.

A view of the world's tallest skyscraper in 1933 from the RCA Building.



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